

# PROJECT FINAL REPORT

## Publishable Summary Report



**Grant Agreement number:** SSH-217028  
**Project acronym:** REMCM  
**Project title:** Religious Education in a Multicultural Society:  
School and Home in Comparative Context  
**Funding Scheme:** Collaborative Project – Small or Medium Scale  
Focused Research Project  
**Period covered:** from 1/1/08 to 31/12/2009  
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## **Glossary**

**Faith schools** – In this study, the term ‘faith school’ is used to refer to a school owned and/or managed by a specific religious group. Countries differ in the terminology used with some countries adopting the term ‘denominational school’.

**Religious and Moral Education (RME)** – In the context of this study, the term RME is used to represent a subject area in primary schools that deals with religion, morals and values. We acknowledge that there are differences between countries with regard to the use of the term, with some countries differentiating between ‘religious education’ and ‘values education’. However, the term RME is used to facilitate cross-country comparability.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Rationale for the study

Across European countries, the education system plays a role in the transmission of religious or secular beliefs and values, with consequent implications for social cohesion among religious and cultural groups. The influence of schooling can occur through the presence of explicit religious instruction within schools, the tacit recognition of specific religious practices and festivals, informal socialisation in relation to particular norms and values, specific rules about dress and behaviour, and the socio-cultural networks to which young people are exposed or from which they are excluded. The relative importance of the education system in religious socialisation varies across European countries, with religious authorities playing a significant role in school management in some countries while, in other cases, there is a deliberate separation or a limited cooperation between Church and school structures (as in Germany, for example, where any cooperation occurs at the federal rather than national State level).

The institutional position of religion in schooling is, however, contrasted against a changing societal context. In recent years, many European countries have faced two countervailing trends. Firstly, many countries have seen a decline in the proportion of the population indicating a formal religious affiliation and, more markedly, in regular religious practice, a process which some commentators refer to as ‘secularisation’. Secularisation may occur at the macro level, with the separation of religion from other institutional spheres, and/or at the micro level, with a shift in the beliefs and practices of individuals (Evans and Evans, 2008). However, secularisation is itself a contested concept and may obscure important complexities in people’s cultural attachment to, and engagement with, religion. Davie (2006), for example, suggests that belief may become ‘detached’ from institutional membership (‘believing without belonging’). Furthermore, despite the diminishing role of the institutional Churches in people’s everyday lives, they may continue to play an important symbolic function in identity formation (which Demerath, 2000, terms ‘fuzzy fidelity’).

Secondly, in many European countries there has been a growth in the numbers affiliated to some religious groups (principally evangelical Christian and Muslim groups). This phenomenon is, at least in part, related to recent immigration patterns, with religious affiliation interacting with cultural identity in complex ways. Thus, Casanova (2004) points to the way in which different dimensions of ‘otherness’ in terms of religion, culture and socio-economic status coincide in the case of Muslims.

Patterns of religious decline and revival have prompted renewed discussion of the role of religion in schooling, a debate also fuelled by an increased emphasis in policy discourse on school quality and school choice (see OECD, 2006). Specific issues of contention in the debates over religion and education have included:

- The extent to which there should be ‘free choice’ of schools and a provision of separate ‘faith schools’ (see, for example, Bakker, 2001; Halstead, 2007);
- The degree to which religious and/or secular beliefs and values should be formally ‘taught’ within the school system;
- The school’s right to specify rules regarding, for example, a dress code for students (see, for example, the controversy over the hijab in UK, Belgian and French schools);

- The extent to which religious beliefs should be taken into account in the broader curriculum (see, for example, the debates over the relative merits of ‘intelligent design’ and the theory of evolution, and over the role of religious values in sex education).

In spite of these public debates, there has been comparatively little attention to how the interaction between religion and education plays out at the meso (school) and micro (family) levels (Jäggle et al., 2009). This study is concerned with exploring how religious/secular beliefs are formed in the arenas of the education system and the family across different EU country contexts. In the following subsection, we place the REMC study in the context of existing research on religion and schooling, and highlight the original contributions to knowledge made by this study.

## **1.2 Contribution of the study**

Studies of religious identity among young people in general have generally been based on single-country research (see, for example, Francis, 2001; Halsall, 2005; Sirin and Fine, 2008; Streib, 2005). Some single-country studies have highlighted potential tensions between school and home in relation to religious beliefs and values (see, for example, Abbas, 2003; Vertovec and Rogers, 2004; Jacobson, 1998). However, to date, comparative research on religion has rarely explored the relative role of the family and the school in the formation of religious identity among children and young people. The most fully developed comparative study of religion and schooling (Knauth et al., 2008) explores the perspectives of young people aged 14 to 16 years of age (see also Ziebertz and Kay, 2005, 2006, 2009). Our study goes further than this REDCo study in two respects. Firstly, it not only explores the perspectives of the young person themselves but the viewpoints of their parents and teachers. Secondly, the study is innovative in exploring the perspectives of younger children (aged 7-12) on their religious identities. Previous studies of younger children have tended to adopt a developmental approach (for an overview, see Roehlkepartain et al., 2006) or have viewed them as largely ‘passive’ in the religious ‘transmission’ process (see, for example, Bao et al., 1999; Hayes and Pittelkow, 1995). In contrast, the REMC study views children as active agents in their own religious formation (see section 1.3).

A further innovative aspect of the study is the insights it yields into the role of religious affiliation in school choice. Research on the reasons for school choice has often overemphasized the issue of academic achievement, thereby ignoring the importance of what might be seen as the primary rationale for faith schools: the socialisation of children into the religious beliefs and values of their parents and/or community. However, the salience of religion/beliefs as a dimension of school choice has been relatively neglected.

In sum, the REMC study provides original insights in the following ways:

- It is the first study of its kind to examine the interface between home and school in the formation of religious identity among children and young people in a cross-national context.
- The study focuses on the perspectives of children rather than on those of adolescents, providing insights into the processes at play in the religious identity formation of a younger age-group.
- It adopts a broad view of religious beliefs and values, including the perspectives of parents and children with secular worldviews.

- It addresses the gap in knowledge on the role of religion in school choice, particularly in a comparative perspective involving quite different systemic contexts.
- The team brings multiple and complementary thinking and methods to the research, drawing on the fields of sociology, education and educational policy, theology, comparative study of religion, equality studies and economics.

As a result, the REMC study contributes to national and international knowledge on religion and schooling, and provides a vital evidence base for policy-making in the education arena.

The detailed objectives of the study are:

1. To document the place of religion in educational systems across Europe, drawing on existing research and new primary research;
2. To assess the importance of religion/belief as a basis for primary school choice in different systems, drawing on new primary research among parents, children and teachers;
3. To explore the factors influencing the formation of religious identity among children in different educational systems, focusing in particular on the interplay between home and school, drawing on new primary research among parents, children and teachers;
4. To highlight the implications of our findings for policy development at national and European level.

### **1.3 Conceptual framework of the study**

This section outlines the conceptual framework of the study; further details of this framework are provided in [Deliverable 4: Draft document on conceptual framework](#).<sup>1</sup> This study draws on four central concepts: social institutions (Church, State and schooling), social identity, religious identity and its formation, and children's agency.

#### *Social institutions*

The nature of the relationship between Church and State, and the place accorded religion within schools, varies across European countries. The current form of the religion-education relationship must be seen as the outcome of a historical process of contestation, conflict and accommodation, a process which is discussed in Chapter 2. The focus of the REMC study is primarily on the meso (school) and micro (family) levels. However, these meso and micro processes play out in very different institutional contexts. The study, therefore, takes account of significant dimensions of the institutional context (macro level), which include:

- The degree of separation between Church and State, and the relative status of particular religious groups within the broader society;
- The extent of differentiation in the nature of primary schools;
- The degree of school choice afforded to families;

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<sup>1</sup> A full list of the deliverables is given in Appendix 1.



- The prevalence of specific faith schools in the primary school system;
- The provision of religious/moral education in school, and the content of such provision;
- The extent to which provision is made for families with diverse religious and secular beliefs and values.

These dimensions are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2 below.

### *Social identity*

The notion of social identity (individual and group) forms the core of our conceptual framework. Within social science, there is currently a good deal of interest in the ways in which individuals develop and negotiate their sense of self and identity over the life course. Classical social science saw identity as being stable and shaped by an individual's position within wider economic and social structures (see, for example, Bandura, 1977). Theorists of late modernity (for example, Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992; Lash and Urry, 1993) have questioned the notion of an essential self, emphasising instead the self as a social construct, constantly defined and redefined in a range of social contexts. However, these views have been criticised for placing too much weight on individual agency and neglecting the structural context within which identity is formed (Bendle, 2002). In response, a number of theorists have argued for the need to conceptualise the on-going construction and reconstruction of the self as framed by, and interacting with, existing social structures (Callero, 2003).

Increasing attention has also been paid to the notion of multiple identities, that is, the way in which different dimensions, such as gender, social class, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, nationality etc., can become the basis of individual or group identities (Jones and McEwen, 2000). Such identities are not static since different aspects of one's identity can be salient at different points in time or in different settings (Jones and McEwen, 2000). Thus, religion may be more or less dominant as an element of one's identity, which Wimberley (1989) terms 'religious identity salience'.

### *Religious identity*

In this study, we explore the formation of religious identity as one possible dimension of parents' and children's identities. In so doing, we adopt a broad definition of 'religious identity', which encompasses a range of religious and secular attitudes, beliefs and practices. This is particularly important given that secular identities are often treated as 'hidden' or 'nothing' (Rudge, 1998).

There is some emerging research which seeks to examine religion as a basis for group identity and the complex ways in which it interacts with other dimensions of identity, including social class, cultural background, nationality and gender. Religious ties may facilitate the maintenance of ethnic boundaries and identity among immigrant groups (Sanders, 2002). Religious networks may serve as an important way for individuals to build social capital, with the children of immigrants increasingly turning to their 'inherited religion' as their primary source of identity (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007; Yang and Ebaugh, 2001). Even where people do not actively practice (or believe in) a particular religion, religion may be enmeshed with their cultural identity. Thus, those who practice in a very visible way keep the religion alive 'vicariously' for those who do not (Davie, 2007).

### *The formation of religious identity*

How then is religious identity formed? International research has indicated a very strong association between parental religious beliefs and practices and those of their children (see [Deliverable 3: Review of literature on religious socialisation](#)). However, the processes underlying this relationship have been subject to debate, and Boyatzis and Janicki (2003) argue that ‘we still know very little about *how* parents influence children’s religiosity’ (p. 253). Many studies have emphasised the notion of ‘religious transmission’, indicating the role of parents in shaping the beliefs and values of their children (see, for example, Nelsen, 1980; Hayes and Pittelkow, 1993; Bao et al., 1999; Min and Kim, 2005; Bader and Desmond, 2006). Parents are seen as the primary influence on their children’s beliefs both directly through socialisation but also indirectly through their wider social contacts (Cornwall, 1989; Gautier and Singelmann, 1997; Helve, 1991; Sherkat and Elliott, 1999). Other theorists, however, have criticised the notion of ‘religious transmission’ as overly deterministic, instead emphasizing the agency of both adults and children (Dillon, 2001).

### *Children’s agency*

Theories of children’s religious formation have differed in their relative focus on developmental or relational aspects. Some theorists have suggested that there are distinct phases in young people’s religious development, which parallel their broader cognitive and moral development (Fowler and Dell, 2006). Others have stressed the relational aspects, focusing on the transmission of religious beliefs and values from parent to child. Both perspectives have the disadvantage of downplaying the role of children’s agency. The developmental perspective largely discounts children’s own active engagement with religious beliefs, in contrast to the children’s spirituality movement in the English-speaking world (see Hay and Nye, 1998; Hart 2006) and the German ‘Kindertheologie’ movement (Bucher et al., 2002), which both argue that spiritual awareness is present at very young ages (Hart, 2006). The ‘religious transmission’ perspective tends to frame children as entirely passive (Boyatzis and Janicki, 2003) and fails to allow for discontinuity or even contestation between the home and other arenas (such as the school or the local community) over religious values. While little empirical research has investigated religious formation in terms of children’s agency, an exploratory study has indicated the potential of such an approach by highlighting the ‘bidirectional’ nature of parent-child communication in relation to religion (Boyatzis and Janicki, 2003). Thus, children were found to ask questions of their parents regarding religious issues and initiated and terminated such conversations on a frequent basis. Similarly, Zine’s (2001) study of Muslim youth in Canada indicates the way in which Muslim students actively negotiate and maintain their religious identities within secular schools.

This notion of children as active agents in their own religious formation has parallels in the emerging research and policy literature on children’s rights (see Clark et al., 2003). A number of studies have focused on the ‘pupil voice’ as a way of determining more effective ways of engaging children in school and enhancing their learning (McIntyre et al., 2005). Furthermore, research with children has indicated important aspects of their well-being which had not always been taken into account

previously: ‘given a chance to offer their ideas, views and tell of their experience, children can make adults think differently and see the possibilities of change’ (Burke, 2007, p. 370). A good deal of this work has focused on adolescents, usually those at secondary level. However, a number of studies have extended this approach to incorporate very young children, even those at pre-school level (see Clark, 2007; Cremin and Slatter, 2004; Hewett, 2001), and Tangen (2008) argues for using the same approach to tap into the views of children with special needs.

While the REMC study places children’s agency at its core, it must be recognised that a child’s agency is bounded by their position in the family and in school. International research indicates a shift in the nature of parent-child relations away from more authoritarian to more negotiated modes of interaction, with young people now having a greater ‘voice’ within the family, at least within some cultures (see Devine et al., 2004; Dillen, 2007). However, the degree of autonomy afforded children is likely to vary by family characteristics (both objective and subjective, including social class, parenting style, number of other children etc.) as well as the child’s own characteristics (gender, temperament etc.)(see Lexmond and Reeves, 2009). Similarly, in spite of a growing emphasis on consultation with children regarding educational issues (see Clark et al., 2003), the school context remains largely hierarchical in nature with an inequality in power between teacher and pupil (Lynch and Lodge, 2002). Thus, children’s agency may be constrained by both formal structures (for example, the requirement to attend religious/moral education class) and/or the informal climate of the school (that is, the extent to which particular religious beliefs underpin the attitudes and behaviour of teachers).

In sum, the central element of our conceptual framework is the notion of religious or secular affiliation, belief and practice as an expression of individual and collective or group identity. Within our framework, identity is viewed as being constructed and reconstructed as part of a dynamic process, with children viewed as active agents in their own religious and moral formation. This identity formation is situated in a macro system which shapes the institutional position of religion in schooling.

#### **1.4 Methodological approach**

This study draws on two sources of information: secondary analysis of existing data; and primary research on children, parents and schools. Firstly, secondary analysis of European Values Survey data was used to explore variation across Europe in levels of religious affiliation and self-declared religiosity. Existing documentation on the structure of educational systems was then used to derive a typology of the place of religion in schooling across Europe. More details of this approach are provided in Chapter 2. This phase of the research provides a vital underpinning for collecting data and interpreting the patterns found at the country level.

Secondly, primary research was carried out in the five case-study countries: Belgium (Flanders), Germany, Ireland, Malta and Scotland. This research involved in-depth qualitative interviews with teachers, parents, and children in case-study schools which were selected to capture different dimensions of experience. These interviews were supplemented with in-depth interviews with key stakeholders (such as religious groups, education management bodies, teacher unions and so on) to explore the (changing) institutional context within the case-study countries. A detailed account of the methodology used for the primary research is presented in Chapter 3.

## **2. Religion and schooling: the European context**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter has presented the context for the study. The aim of this chapter is to provide a broad, European-wide picture of the nature and profile of religiosity, and the nature of the relationship between religion and the educational system. The chapter, which draws on [Deliverable 6: Document on typology of European school systems](#), is structured in four parts. The first part is devoted to examining cross-country variation in the strength of religiosity and the relationship between religiosity and demographic factors. The second part looks at the architecture of educational systems across EU Member States. Attention is paid, in particular, to the way faith schools are treated in national educational policy. The third section explores the factors that affect decisions regarding school choice, both on the parent side and on the school side. Finally, the last section brings the previous three levels (religiosity, educational system structure and school selection) together, probing the links between them.

### **2.2 Religiosity in Europe**

Before examining the specific place of religion in (primary) education, we take a step back and look at religion from a broader perspective. Since this entire study is centred on the formation of religious identity in young children and the role that parents and schools play in that process, it makes sense to first ask how religious the societies in which these children live are.

To answer this question, we will make use of a cross-national survey of attitudes and beliefs in Europe, namely the European Values Survey (EVS). The EVS offers the possibility of investigating the degree of religiosity in 26 European Union countries (data for Cyprus is unavailable) by providing comparable data on a number of indicators connected to religious affiliation, identity and beliefs. Unfortunately, the fourth and latest EVS wave (carried out in 2007-2008) is, as yet, unavailable. Consequently, the third wave has been used. This choice has the drawback of relying on data that are rather old (the third wave was carried out between 1999 and 2000). On the other hand, the European Values Survey has the advantage of offering a rather extended battery of questions related to religion, as well as other important attitudes, in a cross-national context.

#### *2.2.1 Indicators of religiosity*

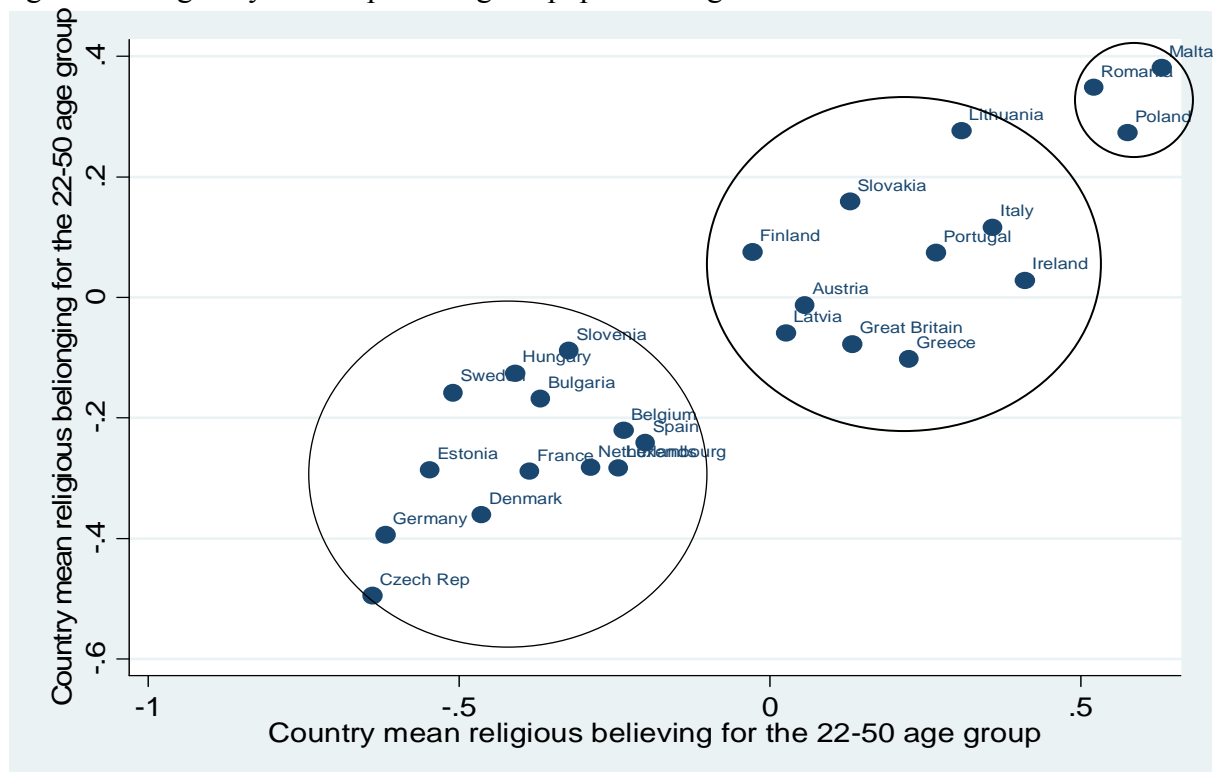
A full-blown definition of religiosity will not be attempted here. However, it is important to distinguish between two separate, though complementary, aspects. As a rule, religious systems include both practices (usually institutionalized in the form of a Church) and a collection of ideas and beliefs. Both dimensions have been mapped by constructing two corresponding indexes. The first one relates to affiliation/identification with the institutional side of religious practice, i.e., a Church, and will be referred to henceforth as ‘religious belonging’. The second one is connected more to the ideational/belief side of religion and shall be termed ‘religious believing’. While religious systems normally integrate both the institutional and the ideational sides, a growing body of research indicates the possibility of the existence of both

belonging without believing and especially believing without belonging (Davie, 2006).

To tap into the concept of ‘religious belonging’, nine questions present in the EVS database were used referring to membership of religious organisation, attending services, importance of religious services and Church. These questions were found to measure one underlying concept (Cronbach’s Alpha=0.81). The religious belonging index has been created by averaging the standardized values for each indicator. A similar approach was used to construct an overall index for religious believing (for further detail see Avram and Dronkers, 2009). As in the case of ‘religious belonging’, the resulting scale is highly reliable (Cronbach’s Alpha=0.91). The overall index has been constructed by averaging the standardized values for each indicator.

A positive relationship between the two indexes, namely ‘religious belonging’ and ‘religious believing’, exists. This relationship holds both at the individual level (the correlation between the two items is very high at 0.73) and at the country level (with a correlation of 0.90). In other words, individuals who bestow greater importance to the Church in their lives are also the individuals who embrace religious ideas and beliefs more thoroughly. Furthermore, countries with higher levels of religious belief tend to have higher levels of religious institutional affiliation.

Figure 1: Religiosity in Europe among the population aged 22-50



This pattern relates to the population as a whole. However, our main concern lies with primary school children and their parents. Regrettably, the first group is impossible to tap since the EVS sampled only those aged 16 years or over, and therefore missed young children altogether. Parents of young children, on the other hand, were included in the study and age is used as proxy for identifying them. A scatter plot relating the same two indexes, namely ‘religious belonging’ and ‘religious believing’

at the country level, this time restricting it to the population aged 22-50, reveals a similar positive association to that found for the population as a whole (see Figure 1).

Looking at the scatter plot in Figure 1, three groups of countries seem to emerge (see Table 1).

*Table 1: Country typology of religiosity*

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Countries</i>
Large group with lower scores on believing and belonging	Czech Republic, Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Estonia, Sweden, Denmark and France
Medium-sized group with higher scores on belonging and especially on believing	Slovakia, Lithuania, Ireland, Portugal, Italy, Finland, Austria, Greece and the UK
Small group with strikingly high values on both the religious belonging and believing indicators	Romania, Poland and Malta

### *2.2.2 Religiosity, demographic factors and attitudes*

It is important to examine not only the overall levels of religiosity across Europe but also the extent to which levels of religiosity vary across different groups of the population. On the one hand, religiosity may be associated with certain demographic characteristics. On the other hand, differences in the demographic composition of countries may explain the variation in the country average score of religious belonging or/and religious believing.

Across most European countries, women tend to have higher scores on the religious believing index than men. The exception to this pattern relates to a group of countries with relatively low average scores on this index: France, Germany, Belgium, Spain, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Greece and Luxembourg. Gender differences on religious belonging are statistically insignificant, again with exceptions; in this case, in Belgium, Hungary and Romania women tend to have higher scores than men.

Quite surprisingly, older respondents have a stronger religious institutional attachment only in Finland and Ireland, while stronger religious beliefs have been found to be associated with being older in Finland, Denmark, Ireland, Malta and the UK. In the Czech Republic, older people have weaker religious connections with the Church(es) and weaker religious beliefs than younger people, perhaps reflecting broader social change in the recent period.

Members of majority religious groups tend to have higher scores on both religiosity indicators, regardless of the specific religious group which happens to constitute the majority. This finding applies to almost all countries. The exceptions relate to the UK for both religiosity scales, Romania in the case of 'religious belonging', and Sweden in the case of 'religious believing'. In the latter three cases, there is no statistically significant difference between individuals belonging to majority or minority faith groups.

Analyses were conducted to explore whether between-country differences were attributable to demographic variation. It is found that country-level differences persist when these variables are taken into account.

Further analyses were conducted on the extent to which religious belief and affiliation are associated with different attitudes (for further details, see Deliverable 6). Individuals with either strong religious institutional attachment or strong religious beliefs have a higher propensity, on average, to show less tolerance in relation to social issues, such as adultery, homosexuality, abortion, suicide etc.. To a lesser degree, they also hold stricter views when it comes to moral and civic issues. Countries with more religious people (either in their connection with the Church or in their beliefs) are also more conservative in their views on these social issues. No such relationship could be found between the religiosity indexes and either the 'ethics scale' or the 'civic behaviour scale'.

Analyses were also conducted on the relationship between religiosity and gender attitudes. At the individual level, respondents who have higher scores on either of the two religiosity indexes tend to hold more conservative attitudes towards gender roles. The traditionalist bias is more marked for respondents with a strong link to the Church than for respondents with strong religious beliefs.

At the country level, one must first note that East European countries (including Greece), generally, have a lower mean score on the gender index, i.e., they are more traditionalist. When looking at the country mean scores on religious belonging and religious believing, only the former is associated with the country score on the gender attitude scale (the correlation size is 0.40). Countries where the attachment to the Church is still powerful are also countries where more people have more traditionalist views towards women. While a similar negative correlation between religious believing and gender attitudes exists, its size is much smaller (-0.29) and, in fact, it is statistically indistinguishable from zero. Thus, gender attitudes, more specifically traditionalist views on gender, tend to have a stronger connection with 'religious belonging' and a somewhat weaker association with 'religious believing'. A stronger institutional attachment is a better predictor of embracing traditional gender roles than strong religious beliefs both at the individual and at the country level.

In sum, an analysis of religiosity in Europe revealed important variations across countries in the overall level of religiosity. Interestingly, demographic characteristics are only weakly related to religiosity, while a clear association with both tolerance and attitudes to gender roles could be established. Unsurprisingly, more religious people tend to be less tolerant, especially towards deviations from Church-advocated conduct. Moreover, they view gender relations through a more traditionalist lens. But perhaps the most interesting finding is that there is not much differentiation between 'belonging' and 'believing'. Not only are the two indexes through which these concepts have been operationalized highly inter-correlated, but they are also linked in strikingly similar ways to both the tolerance and the gender scales. Both the direction of the association and, more importantly, its magnitude are often comparable for the two indexes measuring religiosity. There are slight differences of degree though, which point towards 'religious belonging' tapping into a more 'extreme' type of religiosity than 'religious believing'.

## 2.2 Educational Systems in Europe

### 2.2.1 Structure of educational systems

Members of the European Union organize and deliver education in very different ways. Historical legacies, such as the time-point when the first schools were established, State formation and the role that the State subsequently adopted, the position and involvement of the Church, have all shaped outcomes such as the balance between the public and the private sectors, the centralization of the educational system, school autonomy, the status of teachers, and so on. The objective of this section is to map the variation that exists in the setup of the educational systems of the 27 countries that are members of the European Union. In particular, we are interested in the role that various religious communities play in the national educational configuration, as well as in the place of religious education in the public system.

To this end, use has been made of information contained in Eurydice.<sup>2</sup> The national reports provide a detailed description of the legislative framework which regulates the educational system, including school careers, financing, administration, curriculum, pupil assessment, school evaluation and so on. In addition, some information is given regarding empirical realities such as the size of the private sector or the size of the fees that parents have to pay in the private sector. In total, ten indicators have been extracted from the data contained within the reports. As our main interest lies in the link between religion and schooling, we have focused on three aspects of this relationship, namely, the role of religion in public education, the existence and organization of faith schools, and school autonomy. The latter dimension has been added in order to establish potential country divergences in the way the State controls private/faith schools. The ten indicators (which may relate to primary and/or secondary education) are:

- the Church-State relationship (whether there is separation of Church and State);
- teaching of religious/moral education in public schools (whether it is compulsory, optional or absent, and whether schools are obliged to provide religious education to their pupils if the subject is only optional); religious education may relate to both faith formation and/or to a study of world religious systems; countries vary substantially both in the content that is taught under the heading of ‘religious education’ and in the authorities entitled to shape that content; since there is not enough information in the national reports for a more nuanced view, here only the presence or absence of ‘religious education’ in the school curriculum, as well as the status of the subject, is investigated; the issue of cross-country variation in the nature of religious/moral education is analysed in detail using primary research (see Chapter 4);
- the freedom of religious entities to set up schools;
- the size of the private sector (the definition of the private sector is based on OECD criteria, i.e. composition of the board and not on financing; see next section for more details on the OECD definition);
- subsidization by the State of the private sector in general and of faith schools in particular (size and mechanisms of providing subsidies for the private

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<sup>2</sup> The Eurybase database contains national reports which describe the educational system; see <http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/Eurydice>.



sector; additional conditions that private schools must fulfil in order to receive subsidies);

- existence of a common national curriculum (a common national curriculum is considered to exist when a central agency establishes compulsory subjects to be taught, their content and the minimum (and possibly maximum) number of hours devoted to teaching that content; on the contrary, if only developmental/skill acquisition objectives are set, but not the means to achieve them, the country is considered to have no common national curriculum);
- control of the schools by a State/national authority (attention is paid in particular to the existence of quality evaluations of private schools by a public body);
- freedom of setting staff policy in the private sector (several aspects are of interest: whether specific teaching qualifications are required in order to teach in the private sector, mechanisms for appointing teachers, dismissal conditions as well as the freedom of the school to set the salaries of its staff);
- centralization of the school system (the focus is on whether the educational system is managed by a central entity and its regional/local branches or whether local authorities are responsible for running schools in their area);
- existence of national examinations (whether pupils sit compulsory or optional examinations organized at the national level, with externally set subjects and/or external marking);
- the cost of attending a private (primary) school (any fee limitations that the law imposes on subsidized private schools as well as information – if it exists – on the actual fees that private schools charge).

Substantial country divergence exists in relation to all of these indicators. The exception relates to the fact that all European countries allow for the establishment of private schools, albeit some impose a more thorough approval procedure than others. Most European countries have a constitutional separation of Church and State. This is especially true for Catholic countries, where the State and the Church have fought for primacy, whereas Orthodox and Protestant countries, where the State has had a history of incorporating the Church, tend to have a less clear-cut separation

Religious education is generally available in all of the public school systems, except for France where there is a well-established principle of secularism within public education. However, countries differ in the emphasis and the weight they give to religious education, ranging from compulsory (Austria, Cyprus, Greece), or quasi-compulsory (a special procedure to opt out is needed, for example, in England), to offering it on an optional but regular basis (where students have to opt out, e.g. Malta, Belgium, Netherlands, Bulgaria, Poland, Portugal, Scotland ) or offering it on request (where students have to opt in, e.g. Estonia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania). Countries also differ in the extent to which they require schools to provide religious education in the pupil's specific faith, when the subject is optional.

Considerable variation in the size of the private sector exists as well, from under 1% of the pupil population in Bulgaria and Lithuania to almost 100% in Ireland. Not surprisingly, the private sector tends to be more developed in countries where at least some public funding is made available to private schools. The exceptions are Central and East European countries where the very recent re-emergence of the private sector is still evidenced by its small size despite governmental support.

A national curriculum, quality control, as well as national examinations, are all ways in which the content of teaching and the instructional process in private schools

may be controlled from the central level. The strictest form of control is the setting of a national curriculum. In prescribing the content and goals of a sizable portion of (sometimes the entire) teaching time, it allows for less flexibility at the school level for the establishment of a certain ethos or specific orientation. On the other hand, in focusing on the input, the imposition of a national curriculum does not provide for any output control. From this point of view, the introduction of national examinations constitutes the opposite approach to the establishment of a national curriculum. It does provide for some, albeit indirect, control of the content of the educational process (for example, by drawing examination questions from a given syllabus), but it highlights the output side, that is, the actual achievement of students. Direct quality control, most often through external inspection, represents the middle ground between curriculum setting and national testing. Depending on how the inspection is structured, and the exact role of the inspectors, it can emphasize more the actual content of teaching or the educational output. All countries have some form of control, either through a national curriculum, national tests or an inspection system. In fact, the majority of European countries have at least two such control mechanisms in place. A more detailed account of country variation along these lines will follow further on, in the context of a discussion on school autonomy.

Schools may be also circumscribed in their ability to set their own staffing policies. Almost all countries set special teaching certification/qualifications as a necessary precondition for someone to be able to work in the private educational system (a clear exception is England and Wales). Hiring and dismissal usually fall under the remit of general employment legislation, although special additional conditions may apply either because of educational legislation (for example, Hungary, Lithuania), collective branch agreements (for example, Finland) or because the government directly pays teacher salaries and is thus their employer (for example, France, Spain). Restrictions regarding the flexibility of pay setting may also apply, especially when schools receive funding for all or a considerable proportion of their personnel expenses from the State budget (for example, in Belgium, Ireland, the Netherlands).

Finally, schools differ in the allocation of administrative responsibilities regarding schools to the central or local level. A plurality of countries has centralized systems in which a central body, usually the Ministry of Education, is responsible for administering schools (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, France, Romania, Portugal, Luxembourg, Malta, Ireland, Austria, Slovakia, and Slovenia). A slightly smaller number of countries has decentralized responsibility for running, and often also for financing, public schools at the local level. In this case, it is municipal authorities that are in charge of taking administrative decisions (e.g. establishing or closing schools, appointing staff etc.) regarding public schools (Netherlands, Scotland, Poland, Sweden, England, Hungary, Denmark, Spain, Belgium, and Germany). They are also, from a technical point of view, the legal bodies which own schools. Finally, there are some countries that split the various responsibilities between the central and the local levels. Usually, the Ministry of Education retains decision-making power over more sensitive areas, while local governments are charged with settling more routine issues (Finland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, and Estonia).

The cost of attending a private school may differ significantly by country and, in some countries, by school. Very often, countries that offer public funding for private schools on an equal footing to public ones, or that shoulder the bulk of private school expenses, impose limitations on the fees that private subsidized schools may ask of their pupils. The most common situation is one in which private subsidized

schools are required to provide education free of charge to their students (for example, Finland, Belgium, Spain and Hungary and Slovakia for the higher subsidy amount). In a few cases, governments allow some fees to be charged but these have to be either nominal or proportional to family income (for example, Slovenia or Germany).

No clear blueprints emerge when looking at all of the ten indicators in conjunction. The ten dimensions cut across each other, thus making any parsimonious grouping of countries into homogeneous clusters elusive. Nonetheless, some broad patterns may be discerned. When looking at the position of the private sector and of faith schools within the private sector, four basic arrangements exist from the funding point of view (see Table 2).

*Table 2: Country typology of funding arrangements for private schools*

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Countries</i>
Integrated educational systems: private education is more or less on the same footing as public education	Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden
Faith-supportive educational systems: countries where faith schools <sup>3</sup> (of some or all faiths) receive more favourable treatment than other schools in the private sector; this favourable treatment may be more significant or relatively modest <sup>4</sup>	Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Malta, Portugal, Scotland, <sup>5</sup> England and Wales
Semi-integrated educational systems: countries that offer varying degrees of subsidization to the private sector, but (always) less than the corresponding amount they spend on the public sector <sup>6</sup>	Belgium, Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Slovenia
Segregated educational systems: countries that fail to make any public funding directly available to the private sector	Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Romania

A quick review of the four categories of countries reveals some interesting findings. Firstly, all of the countries in the fourth category, segregated educational systems, are Eastern Orthodox countries. Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, Orthodox Churches have tended to be national churches and, as such, developed a special relationship with the State. Rather than running a parallel educational network, the Orthodox

3 In some cases, only the majority-faith schools receive funding. For example, in Malta Islamic schools receive no financial assistance from the State.

4 In Austria, Malta, Portugal or the UK, almost no funding is made available for private non-denominational schools. In contrast, in the Central European countries of Hungary and the Czech Republic, faith schools are entitled to have a larger share of their expenses borne by the State.

5 As the remainder of the report will indicate, there are very significant differences between Scotland and the rest of the UK regarding school governance and funding.

6 This category is rather eclectic; it contains countries that make public funding available on generous terms, such as Belgium and Slovenia, but also countries where no public funding is guaranteed although it is offered in some cases, such as Italy.

Church has made its influence felt in public education. As a result, no tradition of separate faith schools developed in these countries. The private sector developed and was perceived as an (almost) exclusively commercial enterprise, with no perceived rationale for State support. Church influence was also evident in public schools in some of the other groups of countries. In Scotland, the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian) schools became non-denominational public schools, with the Church retaining rights of representation on school boards. In the case of Malta, where the Roman Catholic Church is also the national church, the Church has influenced public education such that State schools are *de facto* Catholic schools. At the same time, the Church school sector has, through a number of historic settlements, the latest in 2009, and considerable State funds, continued to expand, whilst retaining much autonomy at the school level.

A sizable private but State-supported sector developed in particular in countries with a large Catholic population (e.g. the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Spain, Germany etc.). Often, these arrangements came about after prolonged accommodation and protracted conflict between the State and the Catholic Church or the Calvinist Churches over the control of the educational system. As a result, faith schools gained equal status with public schools, while (at least initially) maintaining their specific ethos. But because the State often refused to accord a special position to any particular Church, it extended the favourable status enjoyed by Catholic and Calvinist schools to the entire private sector.

A peculiar situation arose in England and Wales.<sup>7</sup> Here, the Church initially established its own educational network but subsequently agreed to have this network taken over by the State. Consequently, faith schools have been integrated into the public sector; in other words, they are financed almost in the same way as public or municipal schools, but the Church has retained considerable influence over the way the schools are run and continues to be represented on their boards. The overall result has been to accord a special position to faith schools within the educational system.

Apart from the presence of a sizable Catholic community, decentralization also encourages the emergence of favourable conditions for the funding of private schools, a situation which is typical of the Nordic countries. The decentralization of the educational system seems to enable the central State to take a more unitary approach towards the various types of schools, thus making school ownership irrelevant when it comes to the allocation of central funds.

The subsidization of private schools by the State is, of course, only one side of the coin. In return for its financial support, the State has imposed, and continues to impose, various controls on schools, thus reducing school autonomy (for example, by setting a ceiling on the fees that may be charged). However, the most important aspect that the State may seek to control is the educational process itself. As already mentioned, there are at least three ways in which the State can try to obtain some leverage, namely, outlining a compulsory national curriculum, establishing national examinations (possibly as a pre-condition for certification), and by directly inspecting schools. Pooling all three aspects together yields a classification of countries in terms of school autonomy. Because prescribing educational content through a national

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<sup>7</sup> The situation in Scotland is quite different to that in England and Wales. Church of England faith schools exist in England but in Scotland, the Church of Scotland schools became the non-denominational schools. The denominational faith schools (virtually all Roman Catholic) in Scotland are public schools but the Church has retained certain rights.

curriculum is potentially the most intrusive way of exercising control, this dimension has been treated differently than the other two. Four categories have been constructed, which represent points along a continuum stretching from extensive school autonomy to strict control of schools (Table 3).

*Table 3: Country typology of school autonomy*

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Countries</i>
Very considerable school autonomy (either national testing or school inspection is used as a method of control)	Belgium, Hungary, Germany and Sweden
Substantial school autonomy (both national examinations and school inspection are employed as methods of control)	Denmark, Latvia, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, England and Wales, Scotland
Some school autonomy (a national curriculum exists along with either national testing or school inspection)	Austria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, Spain
Restricted school autonomy (all of the three control methods are formally present)	France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta (which nevertheless affords much autonomy to Church and Independent schools in particular)

One feature that becomes immediately apparent is the interconnection between school autonomy (as defined above) and system centralization. All countries in the group with the greatest school autonomy have decentralized educational systems, while all of the countries in the group with the least school autonomy have centralized administration. Apart from decentralization, school autonomy can also be linked to the State-Church struggle. Countries in which the State succeeded in subduing the Church (such as France) developed a system which restricts school autonomy. In contrast, in countries where neither of the two parties achieved supremacy, a more flexible framework was adopted allowing for more school autonomy (for example, Belgium and the Netherlands).

To conclude, current educational systems in Europe are very much a product of national historical developments. Past contingencies have created specific equilibriums that retain a lingering influence on the way the educational system is organized and educational instruction structured. Rather than conforming to some logically constructed model(s), current European educational systems mirror past accommodations and compromises. Both public support for the private sector and the various degrees of embedded school autonomy can be traced back to State formation processes, such as the emergence of conflict for supremacy between the State and the (Catholic) Church, the outcome of this conflict, and, more generally, the role that the State assumed in shaping society. In turn, the lasting influence of historical legacies gives rise to a remarkable diversity in the structure of educational provision across Europe that may seem surprising at first glance. Instead, it merely highlights the impact of path dependency on national policy formation.

### 2.2.2 School choice processes in Europe

State legislation can facilitate or, on the contrary, impede the development of the private sector in general and of faith schools in particular. But the ability of private schools to secure a firm foothold hinges on whether parents choose to send their children to private schools instead of public ones. So, the question arises of how this school choice decision is taken. More specifically, who are the parents that are more likely to send their offspring to private/faith schools and what are the characteristics of the schools that are most successful in attracting students? Unfortunately, no comprehensive cross-national data exist on the attendance of public versus private schools at the primary level. Nonetheless, a valuable insight into school choice processes can be gained from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), developed by the OECD. It collects cross-nationally comparable information on the student achievement and skills of 15-year olds, but also contains data on student and school background.

The PISA survey does not directly distinguish between faith and non-faith schools. However, three types of schools can be discerned: public, private-independent (privately managed and mostly privately funded), and private-dependent (privately managed and mostly publicly funded). Obviously, faith schools may be run in a variety of ways, but private-dependent schools can be taken as a reasonable proxy for faith schools.

The detailed analyses conducted relating to 15 countries pooling PISA data for 2000, 2003 and 2006 are presented in Deliverable 6.<sup>8</sup> These analyses use logistic regression models to estimate the odds of choosing a private dependent school over a public one, with separate regressions run for each country. Predictors of school choice include both student-level and school-level characteristics. Quite surprisingly, school characteristics trump family traits in importance. By and large, a more advantaged social composition significantly increases the likelihood of opting for a private-dependent school. Yet the magnitude of the effect is moderate, with the largest impacts to be found in Sweden and Finland. Furthermore, in some European countries (including the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain), there is a lower likelihood of opting for a private school as the school's social composition variable increases. Among the variables measuring educational resources, only the composite index of resources has a consistent positive effect. The other two resource measures, computer-student ratio and student-teacher ratio, often point in a direction contrary to the expected one. Having tuition fees is positively linked to choice of a private dependent school. The finding is, in all probability, spurious and triggered by the fact that most private dependent schools in a number of countries do charge tuition fees. The existence of tuition fees deters parents from choosing a private dependent school for their children only in France, Hungary, Italy, Portugal and Slovakia.

Among family characteristics, the most important predictors are the mother's and father's occupational status, with each having a positive effect on the odds of choosing a private dependent school in eight countries. By contrast, maternal and paternal education levels rarely have a noteworthy effect and, when they do, it is negative. Immigrant status and use of a foreign language at home are usually non-

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<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting that the UK is treated as a single entity within the PISA study so is not used in this analysis, partly because of the small size of the private sector and partly because any analysis is likely to obscure important variation between Scotland and England/Wales.

significant. Moreover, immigrants are more likely to send their children to a private dependent school instead of a public one in Italy, Luxembourg, and Sweden, while in Belgium, France, Finland, and Italy, parents using a foreign language at home are more likely to send their children to a private dependent school.

Obviously, there are similarities and differences in the way school choice processes operate in European countries. Two clusters of countries can be identified. The first cluster contains Belgium, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, and Spain. The second cluster is made up of Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Germany, Luxembourg, and Sweden. Private dependent schools in countries belonging to the first cluster seem to be preferred based on their specific identity and not so much on a perceived higher quality. These schools are fairly inclusive, catering for a wide range of groups, including working-class parents. In contrast, a more middle-class social composition and enhanced resources seem to constitute the prevailing reasons for choosing private dependent schools in the second group of countries. In the latter group, private dependent schools tend to cater particularly for children of the professional classes.

### *2.2.3 Linking religiosity, educational system design and school selection processes*

The previous sections have investigated in turn religiosity, educational system design and school choice processes. In the introduction to this chapter, a potential interconnection of these three areas was posited. More specifically, by influencing national policy, religiosity might impact on the way national educational systems are organized in general, and on the position of private faith schools within the national system in particular. On the other hand, religiosity may play a role in parental decision-making about which type of school their child attends.

Using data from the European Values Survey, Eurydice and the Programme for International Student Assessment, European Union members have been classified according to religiosity, educational system setup and school choice. The next step is to investigate the level of overlap between these three separate classifications. Firstly, it should be pointed out that no two taxonomies share the same number of categories. Secondly, of course not all countries are present in the categorization of school choice processes. Thirdly, and most importantly, the three classification schemes cut across each other. Countries that are members of the same group in one scheme belong to separate groups in one or both of the other two. As a result, no correspondence can be established between the categories of the three classifications.

No connection emerges between the strength of religiosity and the position of private/faith schools within the national educational system. Countries belonging to the group with the lowest scores on religiosity may subsidize private schools on a par with public ones (as in Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain), confer a special position to private faith schools (as in the Czech Republic, Hungary) or subsidize private faith schools to a lesser extent than equivalent public schools (as in France, Belgium, Slovenia). Conversely, countries with moderate to high religiosity scores may be found in each of the four groups in the educational system classification. If religiosity does have an effect on the shape of the educational system, it is historic and not contemporary religiosity that is relevant. The conflict between Church and State and its outcome shaped the specific way national educational systems are organized, especially in terms of the position of private faith schools.

Similarly, no association materializes between religiosity and school choice processes. Although a correspondence between higher country average religiosity and identity-based school choice could have been expected, this expectation is not borne out by the data. Both countries with low and moderate religiosity can be found among members of the first school choice cluster, i.e., countries in which private dependent schools are chosen because of their ethos (for example, both Belgium and Italy belong to this group). The same mix in the country mean religiosity score appears in the second school choice cluster, i.e., countries where private dependent schools are chosen on quality (both Denmark and Austria are members of this group).

Consequently, the main finding that emerges from this three-fold analysis is that the current strength of religiosity impacts neither on the organization of educational systems nor on school choice processes. Put differently, religiosity has practically no impact at the macro level. However, a caveat needs to be mentioned, namely, that all of the conclusions are based on analyses carried out at the country level. The relationship between school selection decisions and religiosity is more appropriately investigated at the individual level and primary research specifically conducted for the REMC study will yield insights into this relationship (see Chapter 4).

### **3. Methodology of the study**

This chapter discusses the methodology used in the primary research conducted for this study, focusing in particular on: the countries included in the study; the choice of schools and students for the study; and the approach to analysis used.

#### **3.1 Selection of countries**

The major contribution of the study lies in its use of primary research to explore the relationship between home and school in the formation of religious identity among children. Research was carried out in Ireland, Scotland, Belgium (Flanders), Germany and Malta, countries which vary across important dimensions, including:

- The religious composition of the population, including the proportion of the population who state that they have ‘no religion’;
- The extent and nature of recent immigration, and policy perspectives on multiculturalism;
- The relationship between Church and State;
- The extent of diversity in school provision;
- Whether religious/moral education is provided in the schooling system;
- The content and nature of religious/moral education.

Chapter 2 has indicated the way in which ‘clusters’ of countries can be identified in terms of the position and content of religious education, indicating where the case-study countries lie along a number of dimensions. Section 4.1 provides a more detailed account of the structure of the educational system, and place of religion within it, for the five countries.



### **3.2 Selection of students and schools**

The primary research focussed on students attending primary schools in the study countries. Chapter 1 had pointed to the relative neglect of younger children's perspectives on religion and schooling. Two other sets of reasons informed the focus on primary education. Firstly, the period of primary schooling tends to encompass preparation for sacraments, such as Communion and Confirmation. As a result, more prominence may be given to religious issues at this stage. Secondly, choice of secondary school is often predicated on the prior choices made by parents when their child first went to primary school, in particular because of the role of 'feeder' primary schools in facilitating entry to specific secondary schools. Thus, the school choices made for younger children are likely to have longer term consequences in terms of the religious, cultural, social and gender mix of the secondary school they attend. In order to provide some insights into choice at secondary level, research focussed on older students within primary schools so as to reflect back on choice of primary school and forward to selecting a secondary school.

The primary research undertaken for this study is qualitative in nature. This approach has a number of advantages: firstly, little comparative research has been done on this topic to date so the study needs to be exploratory in nature; and secondly, it is important to capture parent and student 'voice' in the research rather than being driven by a predetermined agenda. At the same time, it is vital that the research facilitates comparison across countries so a common semi-structured interview schedule was developed for each group of respondents. This common schedule ensured comparability but was sufficiently flexible to allow for account to be taken of the institutional specificities of the national systems.

Respondents were targeted through the school setting in order to allow for an exploration of differences in experiences within as well as between schools. The aim was to capture a diversity of school types as well as families with different belief systems in those schools. Because of cross-national differences in the structure of educational systems, the objective was to explore diversity rather than to have matched types of schools across the countries. Table 4 indicates the types of schools included in the five countries and the number and type of interviews conducted within each school.

Table 4: Profile of sampled schools and number of interviews conducted in the case-study countries

<i>Country</i>	<i>School types</i>	<i>No. and type of interviews</i>
Belgium (Flanders)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catholic school catering for a mix of Catholic and Muslim students</li> <li>• Catholic school with only Muslim students</li> <li>• Community education school</li> <li>• Municipal education school</li> <li>• Alternative education school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal; class teacher; 2 groups of children; 3 parents</li> <li>• Principal; class teacher; 2 groups of children; 4 parents</li> <li>• Principal; 5 teachers; 4 groups of children; 4 parents</li> <li>• Principal; 2 teachers; 2 groups of children; 4 parents</li> <li>• Principal; teacher; 2 groups of children; 3 parents</li> </ul>
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two public common schools</li> <li>• Public Catholic school</li> <li>• Public Protestant school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal; 2 teachers; 3 children; 3 parents</li> <li>• Principal; 2 teachers; 6 children; 6 parents</li> <li>• Principal; 2 teachers; 6 children; 6 parents</li> <li>• Principal; 2 teachers; 3 children; 2 parents</li> </ul>
Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catholic girls' school</li> <li>• Catholic boys' school</li> <li>• Catholic coeducational school</li> <li>• Church of Ireland school</li> <li>• Multidenominational school (Educate Together)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal; 2 teachers; 2 groups of children; 6 parents</li> <li>• Principal; 2 teachers; 2 groups of children; 5 parents</li> <li>• Principal; 2 teachers; 4 groups of children; 6 parents</li> <li>• Principal; 1 teacher; 2 groups of children; 4 parents</li> <li>• Principal; 2 teachers; 4 groups of children; 5 parents</li> <li>• Supplementary: 5 Muslim children; 10 Muslim parents</li> </ul>

Malta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two Catholic State schools</li> <li>• One government-dependent Catholic Church school</li> <li>• Independent school</li> <li>• Muslim independent school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal; 3 teachers; 9 children (in groups); 8 parents</li> <li>• Principal; 3 teachers; 8 children; 4 parents</li> <li>• Principal; 3 teachers; 10 children; 5 parents</li> <li>• Principal; 2 teachers; 15 children; 8 parents</li> <li>• Principal; 3 teachers; 10 children; 7 parents</li> </ul>
Scotland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three non-denominational (public) schools</li> <li>• Two Catholic public schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 teachers; 3 children; 4 parents</li> <li>• 2 teachers; 6 children; 6 parents</li> <li>• 2 teachers; 4 children; 5 parents</li> <li>• 1 teacher; 2 children; 2 parents</li> <li>• 2 teachers; 5 children; 7 parents</li> </ul>

Within each of the schools, one-to-one interviews were conducted with school principals and teachers of students in the selected age-group (either classroom or specialist religion teachers, depending on the context). These interviews covered topics such as:

- Overall philosophy of the school, and the place accorded to religion;
- Perceived profile of students and parents in terms of beliefs and practices;
- Nature and content of religious/moral education taught in the school;
- Day-to-day activities relating to religion/beliefs (e.g. celebration of specific festivals etc.);
- Teacher education regarding religious/moral education;
- Relative role of home and school in the religious formation of children.

Within these schools, students were interviewed in small groups. Where possible, these groups were selected so that children with similar belief systems were interviewed together. In Germany, one-to-one interviews were conducted with children and (separately) their parents. Across all countries, both girls and boys were included in the study (although not always in the same groups) in order to explore potential interactions between gender and religion in shaping school experiences. The student interviews covered topics such as:

- Perceptions of religious/moral education in the school;
- Awareness and perceptions of other belief systems;
- Participation in religious-related practices and activities outside school;
- Communication with their parents regarding religion and belief.

In addition to the teacher and student interviews, some of the research teams collected additional information to provide a more holistic view of the school. In Malta and Scotland, team members carried out some observations of school assemblies and/or religion classes. In Ireland, all students in the relevant year group were asked to complete a short questionnaire on their beliefs and practices, as well as two short written exercises on 'what is important to me' and 'what religion means to me'.

Parents could only be contacted through the school rather than directly. The requirement that parents actively 'opt in' to the study may have implications for the profile of parents interviewed. However, every effort was made to maximise parental participation, and a range of different belief systems and perspectives are accommodated within the study. In Ireland, because of the underrepresentation of Muslim students in the case-study schools, supplementary interviews were conducted with Muslim parents and children attending other schools. Interviews with parents were usually on a one-to-one basis, but a small number of couples were interviewed jointly. The parental interviews covered topics such as:

- Factors influencing the choice of school for their child;
- Knowledge and perceptions of religious/moral education in the school;
- Own religious/moral beliefs, values and practices;
- Communication of beliefs to their child;
- Relative role of home and school in the religious formation of children;
- Potential tensions between home and school in relation to religious/moral issues.

As well as the school-based fieldwork, interviews were carried out with key stakeholders in the five case-study countries. These interviews facilitated an

exploration of the institutional context as well as an appraisal of the key debates regarding religion and schooling in each of the countries. In addition, advisory committees within each of the study countries provided information and feedback on the nature of the educational system and on-going changes within it.

### **3.3 Analysis of the data**

The REMC study set out to provide a holistic understanding of the interaction between home and school in shaping the formation of religious and other beliefs among children. Because of the exploratory nature of the study, it is small-scale in nature and cannot be taken to be representative of all schools in the participating countries. Nevertheless, it provides us with invaluable information on a topic that is relatively under-researched in comparative context. The collection of very rich qualitative information on the perspectives of teachers, parents and students made the analysis process complex. As a first step, it was agreed that each team would draft a 'case-study', indicating the main issues and themes emerging from analyses of data on their country. These documents were then redrafted in the light of comments and suggestions from other project partners.

The REMC study, however, aimed to go beyond national-level accounts to provide a comparative interpretation of the processes at play. To accomplish this, a template outlining the main elements of the conceptual framework and associated questions was circulated to all teams. Each team drafted a document which presented the relevant insights from their primary research. This approach allowed us to retain the complexity of the case-study material while at the same time ensuring comparable information was available across countries. This comparative thematic analysis is presented in the following chapter.

## **4. Religious identity - children, parents and schools in comparative context: primary research findings**

This chapter presents a summary of findings from primary research conducted for the REMC project on stakeholders, school principals, teachers, parents and children in the five case-study countries (Deliverable 9: Qualitative data from five countries). The first section explores the national context, namely, the nature of the primary school system, the place of faith schools, and the role of religious belonging and believing in school choice. The second section looks at how schools construct their identities within this context, both through formal provision for religious/moral education and informal practices which shape school ethos. The third and fourth sections examine the way in which parents and children construct their own religious/moral identities while the fifth section explores potential tensions between home and school over religious/moral issues.

### **4.1 Context**

This section draws on country reports on Belgium (Flanders), Germany, Ireland, Malta and Scotland ([Deliverable 2: Country notes on national systems](#)) and interviews with key stakeholders (part of Deliverable 9) to document the part played by religion in the primary schooling system.

#### 4.1.1 *The structure of primary schooling*

All five countries have some degree of diversity in the kinds of primary schools provided. However, the countries differ in the prevalence of separate faith schools and in the funding and management structures for such schools. In Flanders, the majority of subsidised privately-run schools are denominational in nature, mainly Catholic or Protestant, with some other schools run according to particular educational philosophies (such as that of Steiner). Overall, Catholic schools make up 60 per cent of all primary schools in Flanders. In Germany, the vast majority of primary schools are public schools; privately-run schools, which are either denominational in nature or engaged in progressive teaching methods, make up only 2 per cent of all primary schools. The funding structure for private schools varies across Länder, with half of the federal States (including North Rhein Westphalia, the region used in our study) having only government-dependent (rather than private) faith schools, but they have the same curriculum as State (Common) schools. In Malta, primary schools consist of State schools (attended by 62% of students), government-dependent Catholic Church schools (25%) and independent schools (13%). Government-dependent Church schools are run by religious orders (or more recently by Foundations) but are subsidised by the State, while those attending independent schools are required to pay fees. In 2009, the Maltese State concluded a new settlement with the government-dependent Church School sector, transferring considerable funds to allow it to increase the intake by 2,000 new places over the next few years. Although a separate Church school sector exists, State schools in Malta can be regarded as *de facto* Catholic schools in terms of religious education and ethos (see Section 4.2). Similarly, German State schools are defined as *Christian Common schools* (i.e. Protestant *and* Catholic) by the constitution, with the exception of special non-religious State “Worldview Schools”. Most Scottish State-funded schools are non-denominational, with faith schools making up a fifth of all primary schools. The latter schools are mainly Catholic with one Jewish and three Episcopalian schools. In contrast, in Ireland the vast majority (92%) of primary schools are denominational in nature, mainly Catholic, with a small number of other faith schools (Protestant, Muslim and Jewish) and an Educate Together sector (2%) which promotes recognition of all faiths and none.

The five case-study countries differ in the religious profile of their populations (see Chapter 2). However, all of the countries have a Muslim minority and one striking contrast across school systems is the extent to which separate school provision exists for the Muslim community. In Ireland, there are two Muslim schools, both located in the capital city. In Malta, there is one Muslim faith school, which is part of the independent sector, requiring parents to pay fees. In Scotland, Germany and Flanders, there is currently no separate provision for Muslim children. In Scotland, there had been a Muslim school in Dundee but it is no longer in existence. In Flanders, a number of schools have become *de facto* Muslim by virtue of their student intake, but are not formally recognised as such. The extent to which provision is made for the religious education of Muslim children attending other schools in the five countries will be discussed below.

The current school system in each of the case-study countries reflects the result of historical contention and compromise regarding the appropriate role of religion in education (see Chapter 2 above for a broader discussion of such historical patterns). However, such debates are far from ‘resolved’ within the case-study

countries, with a number of issues relating to school governance, the nature of religious/moral education and the position of teachers in faith schools being raised on an on-going basis.

In Ireland, rapid immigration since the mid-1990s, alongside a growing number of people without religious affiliation, has prompted a debate on whether a predominantly Catholic primary school system is now the most suitable model. In parallel, the multid denominational Educate Together sector is growing in numbers, and a new pilot model of primary school, community primary schools, has emerged which incorporates an inter-faith approach.

In both Flanders and Germany, there is a growing divergence between those who seek a secular approach, with religious/moral education taught from a 'neutral' perspective, and those who seek to impart religious beliefs and values as part of the school day. Such debates have significant consequences for both the structure of the primary school system and the place of religious/moral education within schools.

In Scotland, there has been some controversy about potential tension between employment equality legislation and faith schools' desire to maintain their school ethos. Teacher appointments to Catholic (and other faith) schools are required to be approved "as regards religious belief and character by representatives of the church or denominational body in whose interest the school has been conducted". Teachers appointed to Catholic schools are also required to have a teaching qualification in Catholic religious education. These requirements have been subject to some challenges under equality legislation. A similar situation is evident in Ireland, where schools run by religious bodies were given an exemption under equalities legislation. Teachers in Catholic schools in Ireland are also required to have a certificate in Catholic religious education since religious education is taught by mainstream primary teachers (see Section 4.2). A survey by the primary teachers' union indicated that a significant minority of primary school teachers in Ireland do not teach (denominational) religious education 'willingly'.

The hegemonic position of the Catholic Church in Malta has meant that debates about the role of religion and education have been relatively short-lived. In the 1970s and 1980s, the then Labour government pushed for the provision of free and non-selective education. In response, Catholic schools mobilised around a discourse of choice, that is, parents' right to choose a specifically Catholic mode of religious education and faith formation. A second period of debate occurred in the late 1990s, when the White Paper on the new National Minimum Curriculum (1998) suggested a more egalitarian, multicultural approach. In response to critique, the final text included a reinstatement of the traditional doctrinal position, although the debate did not engage the broader public. More recently, the European Court of Human Rights judgement regarding the removal of the crucifix from State schools in Italy has sparked a media controversy in Malta.

#### *4.1.2 School admissions and school choice*

The structure and nature of the primary schooling system shapes the form taken by school admission policies and influences the degree and nature of choice of school available to families.

There has been considerable debate in many European countries about the issue of school choice, with many countries increasing the range of types of schools open to children at both primary and secondary levels (OECD, 2006). Choice policies have often been founded on market or quasi-market principles, but in some countries

school choice is based on fundamental legal or philosophical principles. In Ireland, the Constitution recognises parents as the primary educators of their children and therefore “guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children” (Article 42.1). If schools have more applicants than places, they may employ a range of criteria for selection; these include a waiting list, giving preference to children who have an older sibling in the school and to families from the local area (Smyth et al., 2009). Faith schools may also give preference to children of a particular religious affiliation. In Flanders too, freedom of choice of school is a central legal principle, with parents with a specific (recognised) religious affiliation given a guarantee that they can access a school that fits with their religious convictions within a reasonable distance of where they live.

Two of the countries, Germany (specifically, North Rhein Westphalia (NRW)) and Scotland, had moved from a catchment-based approach, whereby children were required to attend the local school, to the introduction of choice policies. In NRW, families were previously obliged to send children to the local school unless they wished to opt for a faith or method-based school (‘Sprengeprinzip’). However, the choice afforded to parents has increased since 2008. In Scotland, most children attend their local State school and preference is given by schools to children who live in their catchment area. However, since 1980, parents have a legal right to express a preference for a particular school for their child. Usually such requests are granted, although schools have some discretion regarding admissions when they have more applicants than places. The law requires that all public schools in Scotland are open to all students irrespective of their faith. However, denominational schools may give preference to students of that particular faith.

In Malta, the 2007 Education Act guarantees the right of choice to parents regarding their children’s schooling. State schools are open to all applicants. Admission to government-dependent Catholic schools is commonly through a ballot or lottery system and a baptismal certificate is generally required. Independent schools employ a range of criteria, most notably, the ability to pay fees. For the Muslim independent school, religion is an important criterion for admission.

#### *4.1.3 The role of religion in school choice*

One of the objectives of the REMC study was to explore the role of religion in school choice, an issue often neglected in previous research on school selection. Interviews with parents for this study have yielded fresh insights into this issue with both commonalities and differences evident across the case-study countries.

In Flanders, most parents choose the local school or the school that they consider ‘best’ in educational terms. Religious and moral viewpoints play an underlying role but do not emerge as decisive factors. Parents with secular beliefs tend to favour alternative secular or methods-based schools. Catholic parents tend to select Catholic schools but justify their choice in terms of the quality of the school itself rather than on grounds of faith alone. Interestingly, Muslim parents who opt for a Catholic school tend to justify their choice in a similar way.

In Germany, as elsewhere, multiple reasons were given by parents for choosing particular schools. Locality was a very important factor across all schools, but appeared to be somewhat less important for those attending the Protestant school. In the latter case, parents tended to highlight the positive learning climate of the school as a reason for their choice. Religion was an explicit factor in school choice for



only a minority of parents. However, some parents chose a faith school because they wished to avoid sending their child to a school with a 'different' cultural and language mix.

In Scotland, locality was the main factor in school choice as the majority of parents wanted their children to remain well rooted in their local community. Faith was, perhaps not surprisingly, a more important issue for parents choosing faith (Catholic) schools. Those parents interviewed who were from minority religious groups did not want to send their children to faith schools on the grounds they did not want the children to be segregated socially.

In Malta, with the exception of parents of Muslim children, religious and moral beliefs are of secondary importance in school choice. Those who preferred the Church sector indicated that standards and discipline, as well as family traditions, were the most important considerations in their choice. For Muslim parents, formation in the Islamic faith was the main reason for choice, along with the desire for their children to learn Arabic. However, a desire to protect their children from racist and religious harassment and discrimination by sending them to a Muslim school was also evident; thus, the Muslim school was seen as a 'safe haven' for Muslim children.

In Ireland, the proximity of the school to home was the preeminent factor for the overwhelming majority of parents. However, the deciding influence for a minority of families was the fact that they had a pre-existing connection with the school through the parents and/or older children attending that school. Religion was a particular factor in school choice for some parents, particularly those with minority or no religious beliefs.

The primary research conducted for the REMC study highlights the difference between the *de jure* and the *de facto* situation regarding school choice. Even in systems which explicitly emphasise facilitating parental choice of schools, access to different school types may be highly variable geographically. In Ireland, for example, multid denominational (Educate Together) schools do not exist in every county, and separate provision for Muslim and Jewish children is confined to the capital city. Thus, the majority of children of minority faith or secular beliefs attend Catholic primary schools by default. Similarly, in Scotland minority faith (Catholic) schools are disproportionately concentrated in the Western belt.

A distinction between desired and realised school choice is frequently evident in the case-study countries. For religious and social reasons, minority faith and 'alternative' secular schools may be oversubscribed. In such cases, certain groups of families may be unable to secure their preferred school choice. Thus, in Ireland, a number of the parents of secular beliefs interviewed indicated their difficulty in accessing an Educate Together school; similarly, some Muslim parents indicated the significant waiting list for accessing Muslim schools.

A further issue emerges in relation to parity of recognition for different belief systems. In Flanders, for example, Muslims do not form a recognised school network so are not in a position to provide faith schools in the same way as the Catholic or Protestant churches. A disparity in the recognition of different beliefs may also be evident within the school system, an issue which is discussed in greater detail in Sections 4.2 and 4.5 below. In Germany, for example, only a minority of schools provide Islamic religious education as an alternative strand within the publicly-funded school system and such provision varies across Länder.

A good deal of the debate about beliefs and schooling has focused on the issue of how best to provide for different faith groups, thus commonly neglecting the position of families with secular beliefs, notwithstanding the latter's numerical

representation in many populations. In some countries, such as Ireland, those of secular convictions are required to explicitly ‘opt in’ to alternative multid denominational schools, where available. In other countries, State schools may be regarded as the ‘neutral’ option. However, such neutrality is far from unambiguous. In Malta, for example, State schools are *de facto* Catholic schools in terms of religious education and ethos (see Section 4.2 below). In contrast in Scotland, ‘nondenominational’ State schools, which form the bulk of primary schools, may, at least in some cases, tacitly embody a Christian perspective, albeit from a socio-cultural rather than a doctrinal perspective. The same applies for Germany.

This section has explored study findings on the place of religion in the institutional structure of primary schools within the case-study countries. In the following section, we examine the way in which issues of religion and belief play out at the school level, both through formal provision for religious/moral education and through day-to-day activities and interaction within the school.

## **4.2 The social construction of school identity**

This section explores the construction of school identity across different schools and school types in five European countries (drawing on information gathered as part of deliverable 9). Chapter 1 outlined how the conceptual framework for the REMC study views identity as being formed and reformed in a social context. Religious and moral beliefs form part of the identity not only of individuals but of institutions or organisations. Thus, a school may have a distinct identity, conveyed not only by the formal instruction it provides but by the norms and values it promotes:

What makes a school into this school, or what are the outstanding features of this school (both in a characteristic and a distinguishing sense) and what the members of the school have in common, what they share, what is true for them as members of the collective community and what could be characterised by a certain degree of durability and continuity (de Wolff, 2000, p. 53; quoted in Avest and Bakker, 2007).

School identities can be shaped by, and in turn shape, the social context of individual societies, including aspects of religious and moral belief. The aim of this section is to explore the role of religion and belief in school identities across different types of schools in the five case-study countries. The first subsection gives an overview of the provision of religious/moral education (RME)<sup>9</sup> in primary schools in the participating countries.

### *4.2.1 Provision of religious/moral education at primary school level*

Section 4.1 has outlined the structure of primary schooling across the case-study country, highlighting in particular the role played by faith schools. However, religious/moral education is not confined to faith schools so this subsection explores variation in RME provision across and within schools. Distinctive patterns are evident between State schools, faith schools and alternative secular schools.

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<sup>9</sup> Throughout the report, we adopt the term religious/moral education (RME) to refer to any formal education relating to religious and moral beliefs or values (see Glossary). The nature and content of RME is likely to differ across countries and across different schools, an issue which is a central focus of the study.

In two of the countries, Flanders and Germany, State schools have parallel RME provision for children of different belief groups. In Flanders, the community schools and subsidized official schools are obliged to provide a choice between a (Catholic, Protestant or Islamic) religion-based course and a philosophical (moral) one, called non-confessional ethics. In most German primary schools, separate RME classes are provided for those of Catholic or Protestant beliefs, except in those federal States offering “learning about religion” and ethics as an integrated subject for all children (as in Brandenburg, Bremen, Hamburg). Islamic education is provided in only a small minority of schools on a pilot basis. In contrast, in Scotland, State (non-denominational) schools provide RME but from the ‘learning about religion’ rather than faith formation perspective. In two other countries, Ireland and Malta, the nature of the RME programme differs across school types. For faith schools across all countries, the formal identity of the school usually determines the content of the RME programme, with children in Catholic schools taking part in RME programmes which emphasise Catholic faith formation, and so on. In general, alternative secular, method-based or multi-denominational schools provide an overview of different world religions and combine this with ethics/values education.

Differences were also evident across countries with regard to curriculum development. By law, in Flanders, the State has no authority in curriculum development. The main bodies involved in writing the Catholic RME curriculum are the representative bodies for the Catholic Church, namely the Catholic bishops. The other curricula are designed by the representative bodies of the officially recognised religions, while the non-denominational bodies, mostly Humanists, are involved in writing the curriculum of non-confessional ethics. All representative bodies have their own educational department and school inspectors. In Germany, the RME curriculum is devised by a Curriculum Commission in conjunction with the representatives of the Churches and the federal Ministry of Education. In Malta, while the State has the duty to establish the National Curriculum Framework of Studies for all schools, responsibility for the RME curriculum has been handed over to the Episcopal Conference. In Ireland, the Catholic RME has been developed by an Episcopal Commission under the auspices of the Catholic bishops while the ethical education programme for Educate Together schools was developed within that sector. In Scotland, the RME curriculum for State schools is developed (like all other school subjects) by the public body, Learning and Teaching Scotland, while the Catholic RME programme is under the auspices of the Catholic Education Service.

In terms of curriculum content and programmes used, Catholic primary schools in Ireland and Scotland follow the *Alive-O* programme, which emphasises faith and moral formation. In Malta, the Catholic RME curriculum similarly emphasises faith formation, presenting religion as ‘codes of rules’, following which the development of a conscience can proceed. The Islamic Studies curriculum in the Muslim faith school follows an international Islamic Studies programme, using texts from Libya and France. In Flemish primary schools, the most widely used handbook for Catholic religious education (*The Garden of the Present Day - De Tuin van Heden*) approaches religious education from a developmental psychological perspective, rather than the faith transmission perspective that was used previously. Protestant primary schools in Ireland use a *Follow Me* series that has a strong resemblance to the approach taken in the *Alive-O* programme used in the Catholic schools. In Flanders, there are different curricula for non-confessional ethics, Islam and Protestant religious education. The design of Islam instruction and Protestant religious education is more oriented towards faith transmission (“learning from

religion”; see Grimmitt, 2008). The curriculum in non-confessional ethics focuses heavily on values such as human dignity (consisting of a stress on equality, tolerance, and solidarity) and freedom to think and act. Such values are not based on a religious worldview, but on the principles of a free-thinking humanism, in which students are stimulated to develop an enquiring, discerning and rational attitude. A broadly similar approach is taken in Irish Educate Together schools that use the *Learn Together* programme, which has been developed to combine ethics and values with a comparative view of world religions.

In several countries, societal change and shifts in educational thinking have shaped changes in the RME curriculum. For example, in Flanders, the new RME curriculum takes into consideration changes in Flemish society and takes the current religious context of pluralism, individualization, modernisation and multi-religiosity as a starting-point. In NRW (Germany), a new curriculum for Catholic and Protestant RME has been developed and subsequently piloted. Compared to the previous curriculum, the new Protestant curriculum includes more feminist theology and experience-oriented Bible interpretation. Compared to the previous curriculum dating from the 1980s, the new Catholic curriculum focuses more on Biblical topics and attempts to translate religious concepts into the life-world of children. Similarly, in Ireland a new Catholic RME curriculum, which places a greater emphasis on both the private (prayer) and public (community involvement) aspects of religion, is being developed and piloted.

This section has explored the formal provision of RME across different school types in the case-study countries. However, school identity is not only shaped by formal curriculum but by day-to-day activities and practices within the school setting; this issue is discussed in the following subsection.

#### *4.2.2 Primary school ethos and religion/belief*

Religious identity is found to form a more integral and explicit part of school ethos in faith schools. Preparation for the sacraments of Communion and Confirmation plays a significant role in these schools, either within or outside the school day. Maltese children in Catholic schools are taught about the sacraments as part of the formal curriculum. Further sacramental preparation is provided through after-school Catechesis. Similarly, in Catholic schools in Ireland, sacramental preparation forms part of the school day. In other instances, preparation may be provided outside school hours: thus, Catholic children attending the Irish Protestant or Educate Together schools attended Confirmation classes after school. In Flanders, sacramental preparation mostly occurs outside school and is provided by the local Church, except in some cases where schools cooperate with the Church in Communion preparation. Children in German Catholic schools attend “Pastoral Care” classes that include preparation for Communion. In other German schools, religious sacraments are not part of formal teaching. Similarly, in Scotland only Catholic primary schools prepare the children for the sacraments as part of the curriculum.

Religious identity is found to be expressed and reinforced in a number of ways within faith schools, including through the celebration of religious festivals and occasions, by having religious practices (e.g. prayers, attending Mass) during the school day and exhibiting religious symbols in the school. Prayers were an important part of the school day in many faith (mainly Catholic) schools. For example, in Germany, prayers are not part of the common school culture except in the Catholic schools. The Muslim school in Malta has a Mosque on the school grounds, and

compulsory daily *salat* is organised at midday for the older children. In Scotland, Malta and Ireland, overtly Christian religious symbols were displayed in many schools, particularly within Catholic schools. The ethos or identity of the school was also often conveyed by the name of the school, with religious schools frequently named after saints (for example, in Malta, Scotland and Ireland). All Christian faith schools across the five countries also celebrate Christian festivals.

In two of the case-study countries, Flanders and Ireland, methods-based or multi-denominational schools form a different category with their own distinct identity. These schools do not subscribe to one specific worldview but promote ideas of diversity, attaching equal importance to different worldviews and belief systems (e.g. Educate Together schools in Ireland). In general, they provide an overview of different world religions and combine this with ethics/values education. However, these schools also followed - to different degrees - the Christian calendar in terms of annual rituals (e.g. visiting Church for Christmas, singing carols and having a nativity play). In Scotland, State non-denominational schools were found to vary in the extent to which they embody Christian values, albeit from a socio-cultural rather than explicitly religious viewpoint. In some cases, non-denominational schools, which evolved historically from Church of Scotland schools, had more formal links with local clergy and incorporated prayer into school activities such as assembly. Very similarly, most German public common schools are not explicitly Christian in their school ethos, but are located within a Christian cultural framework.

#### *4.2.3. Provision for minority faith or secular students in primary schools*

Increasing globalization and migration has resulted in an increasingly diverse student population in primary schools across Europe. However, religious diversity is not a new phenomenon, since many of the case-study countries have long-standing minority faith or secular groups within the population. Across the case-study countries, there is therefore a complex interplay of religious identity and other aspects of identity, including nationality, culture, ethnicity and so on.<sup>10</sup> This subsection addresses provision for minority faith or secular students within primary schools.

The extent to which schools cater for students with different belief systems is found to vary across countries and across school types. Because most primary schools in Ireland are denominational, most Catholic schools have some children with different or no religious beliefs among their student population. Within religious schools, parents have the right to withdraw their child from religious instruction. However, there are limitations to the extent to which the school can accommodate parents who prefer their child not to participate in the RME class. Where minority faith students are foreign nationals, they may be withdrawn from RME classes and be provided with additional English language tuition instead. In many cases, there are logistical difficulties involved (relating to limited space and resources) so these students remain within the RME class but do not actively participate. In Flemish Catholic schools, all students are obliged to follow the Catholic religion programme, so there are no separate arrangements for 'minority faith' or 'secular' groups. In the same vein, in Scotland there is no separate provision in terms of teaching for specific minority faiths. In Scottish Catholic schools, this meant that children who were not Catholic participated in preparation for the sacraments. Similarly, in Malta there is no

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<sup>10</sup> In the Irish case, for example, it is important to note that many immigrant students are Catholics while there are many Irish students who represent different or no faith backgrounds.

separate provision for ‘minority faith’ or ‘secular’ groups within schools. In the State school sector, children may opt out of Roman Catholic RME but, as in Ireland, these children are most commonly obliged to remain in class, usually doing other work, sometimes drawn into the lesson by their own interest or the teacher’s desire not to exclude them.

The situation also differs across non-faith schools. In German public schools (‘Common Schools’), non-Christian religious education (i.e. Islam) is generally only provided in specific schools so, for the most part, religious minority students (who are mostly of Turkish origin) are withdrawn from RME class for additional German language tuition. Irish Educate Together schools cater for students from different backgrounds and offer lessons focussing on comparative religion and ethics. In Flanders, Official schools offer separate religious education classes but only for recognised denominations. The children of parents belonging to non-recognised faith groups (e.g. Jehovah Witnesses) can opt out of religious education classes and must organise their own religious education provision. In Scottish non-denominational schools, the curriculum is intended to cover all faiths and not be ‘biased’ towards a particular faith. Few parents in these schools withdrew their children from RME. Generally no alternative arrangements were made for the children whose parents chose to do so.

Many faith schools in Ireland acknowledged students from different cultural backgrounds by having posters on the walls in several languages, noting different festivals, and so on. The extent to which this takes place varies across schools. Issues such as uniform<sup>11</sup> and food have not yet emerged as major issues in Ireland.<sup>12</sup> Similarly to Ireland, the recognition given to children from ‘minority faith’ or ‘secular’ groups in Flemish denominational schools varies significantly. Regarding food, all schools make efforts to provide halal food to Muslim children. However, Muslim festivals were not celebrated, nor was time set aside for prayers. As regards clothing, four of the five case-study schools in Flanders forbid girls from wearing the hijab, with only the method-based school allowing it. The predominant model adopted (in three of the five case-study schools) is to provide school rules which everyone is expected to follow, regardless of their individual beliefs. The German case-study schools did not have any official clothing guidelines, except in the case of teachers who are not allowed to wear headscarves in most German Länder (including NRW). They did not celebrate the religious festivals of minority faith students. However, a legal guideline has been provided by NRW noting that Muslim children were to have three additional holidays (during the first day of Ramadan, the Eid-Ul-Fitr at the end of Ramadan and the Eid-al-Adha, the feast of sacrifice). Some teachers use this opportunity to talk about these festivals in the classroom. In Scottish primary schools, efforts were made to accommodate the cultural and religious requirements of minority groups (for example, by agreeing a common colour of head scarf for Muslim girls or arranging a separate room for Muslims during Ramadan). In Malta, State schools recognise those of minority faith or secular groups in a somewhat muted way by allowing them not to take part in school RME. At times, recognising ethnicity is a proxy for religious recognition, and some schools have included projects on multiculturalism in their school work. Where parents request a permission to keep the child out of school for a religious celebration, the school principal has the discretion

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<sup>11</sup> Some controversy has emerged around wearing head scarves, with one secondary school principal requesting the Department of Education and Science to issue guidelines for schools.

<sup>12</sup> Although in one school students were asked not to share food, because of differences in religious practices but also possible allergies.

to grant permission. In general, Maltese schools vary in the extent to which they accommodate the needs of minority faith students. However, all students are required to wear a standard school uniform and children bring their own food to school.

#### *4.2.4 Teaching of religious/moral education (RME)*

This subsection explores issues around the teaching of religious/moral education. Overall, there was some variation across the participating countries in who was responsible for teaching RME in primary schools. In Ireland, RME is taught by mainstream classroom teachers (except in the Muslim schools, where specialist Islamic teachers are employed). Mainstream teachers also teach the Learning Together programme in multi-denominational Educate Together schools. Primary school teachers in Ireland receive their training either in Catholic or Protestant teacher education colleges and require a certificate to teach religion. In Flanders, teachers of Catholic religious education in community schools and subsidized official schools are educated in a Catholic college of higher education where they also specialize in teaching the Catholic religion. In Catholic primary schools, religion and general education are integrated; therefore, the subject of religious education (or RME) is not set apart and not taught by a specialist teacher. However, the mainstream class teacher is required to receive a mandate from the Bishop, which requires having been baptized and having qualified in a Catholic college of higher education. Consequently, teachers with a different background (e.g. Humanists or Muslims) cannot be employed in a Catholic primary school. The official schools, on the other hand, are more likely to use specialist teachers for RME. While most class teachers do not feel fully prepared for teaching RME, the specialist teachers consider themselves adequately prepared for their role. In Germany, religious education in primary schools is usually only taught by specialist teachers. In some cases, pastors and priests can be employed to teach RME. Only in exceptional cases (when neither a specialist teacher nor a pastor is available) may the task fall to a mainstream classroom teacher. As in Flanders, religion teachers need to be members of, and approved by, the respective Church. Teachers in the German case-study schools reported that they did not feel adequately prepared for discussing religious differences in the classroom.

As in Ireland, RME in Scotland is generally taught by the class teacher in non-denominational as well as denominational schools, although there can be some variation from this practice at the school level (for example, where a school chooses to use a specialist RME teacher). A primary teacher in the Scottish education system has to be able to teach all areas of the curriculum but may not in practice be required to do so. Schools are often supported by specialist teachers in specific areas (e.g. Art, Physical Education etc.). In Scotland, RME is an obligatory subject within initial teacher education, as it is a core subject in schools, both primary and secondary. Teachers in the Scottish case-study schools generally felt adequately prepared to teach RME. However, some teachers felt that they were not sufficiently equipped to teach all aspects of the subject, in particular, aspects of world religion. In Malta, RME is taught by the mainstream classroom teacher in most primary schools (particularly State schools, and several Church and Independent Catholic schools). In these schools mainstream teachers are obliged to teach Catholic RME. The teachers in the Maltese case-study schools had mixed feelings about this requirement and an overall majority of the teachers did not feel adequately trained for it.

Across the case-study countries, teachers position themselves differently in relation to the identity of the school, depending on the school type and their own

beliefs/practices. In Ireland, many of the teachers described themselves as Catholic so saw their role in teaching Catholic RME as consistent with their own beliefs and background. For others, the situation was more ambiguous, and they distinguished between ‘teaching about’ and ‘believing in’ religion. In faith schools, the ethos of the school was seen as rooted in the specific faith of its founders but also as inclusive of other beliefs. In Flanders, many teachers in Catholic schools feel ambivalent about the Catholic identity of the school, not having strong faith themselves. However, most teachers accept the school’s identity because they feel required to.

In Germany, teachers in the public schools were convinced of the integrative potential of the non-denominational ethos of the school, whilst teachers in the confessional school appreciated the integrative potential of their non-segregating approach in RME where all children have to take part. The religious identity of the school was emphasised to a somewhat greater extent by teachers in the Catholic schools than in the Protestant schools. As in other Catholic schools across Europe, in Scottish Catholic schools, the formal religious identity was seen as core to the school ethos. No distinction was drawn between religious and moral values. In non-denominational schools the ‘moral’ identity and ethos was not described in religious terms; however, teachers made reference to the values as having a Christian base. In Malta, the majority of the teachers in the case-study schools were content with the school’s formal religious identity and considered it important. Even moderately religious teachers valued Catholic culture and values. In the State schools, teachers were more likely to be in favour of the school’s formal religious identity (especially if it was inclusive of minorities), while being less satisfied with the formal RME curriculum. In these schools, teachers felt that there was a good balance between the school’s religious identity and the more ‘secular’ aspects of it (e.g. environment, diversity, etc.).

The discussion so far has focused on the place of religion at the school level. In the following sections, we focus on the construction of religious identity at the micro level, exploring the interaction between home and school in the religious and moral development of children.

### **4.3 The social construction of religious identity among parents**

#### *4.3.1 Self-labelling of religious beliefs and practices*

The extent to which the parents interviewed self-identify with institutional religious beliefs and practices varies across and within the case-study countries. In Germany, for example, parents generally exhibit extremely complex identities in their engagement with beliefs and practices, and the institutional labels (as ‘Catholic’, ‘Protestant’ etc.) do not capture this complexity. In contrast, among Catholics in Malta, their affiliation was often seen as so axiomatic that few initially identified themselves as Catholics. Interestingly, notwithstanding their strong affiliation with the formal category of Catholic, many of these parents had difficulty identifying fundamental Catholic beliefs. Consequently, what appeared more salient for Maltese parents was the culture of this faith (including the values it is believed to promote) rather than its actual theological content. In Ireland, while the majority of the parents interviewed affirmed their childhood religious affiliation, Catholicism, they commonly described themselves as ‘not very religious’ and exhibited a complex, and often ambiguous, relationship with their proclaimed religion. There was frequently a rejection of the notion that regular attendance at religious services is a necessary requirement for ‘living a good life’. There was at times a sense of active engagement



with their religious community among parents belonging to minority religious groups in Ireland (such as Church of Ireland and Presbyterian). By contrast, Muslim parents interviewed in Ireland exhibited a strong affiliation to institutional religion, though not necessarily in terms of formal attendance at Mosque. Among Muslims in Malta, there was also a close relationship between the formal category of Islam and parents' beliefs and practices.

Significantly, parents' relationship with the religious sphere was frequently not static, but rather fluid in character. For some parents (notably, in Ireland, Scotland and Germany), having children was often identified as an important event in their shifting orientation towards religion. For instance, a high proportion of parents whose children attended the Protestant church school in Germany noted that having children revitalised their own Christian heritage, prompting them to begin to explore it alongside their children. A number of Irish parents also highlighted the fact that, as a consequence of their desire to provide their children with a similar upbringing to their own, their own active engagement with the religious sphere was solidified as they sought to model good religious practice for their children. In Malta, children were seen as a 'gift' from God, which either confirmed a faith already strong or renewed a flagging faith. It is worth noting, however, that many parents reported no significant shift in their belief systems or practices as a result of having children. Some Christian parents in Flanders even noted that having children meant less space and time to practise their faith.

Much existing research on religious socialisation treats the family as an homogenous unit or, alternatively, problematises heterogeneity by focusing on outcomes in 'mixed faith' families. An important aspect of the REMC research is that it illuminates the diversity which can exist within families, thereby countering the notion that the religious/other belief messages encountered by children within the home sphere are homogenous in nature. For instance, only a minority of the German children interviewed experienced the stereotypical homogenous family background whereby both parents shared a similar religious affiliation. Instead, many of these children's parents exhibited heterogeneous religious worldviews, being affiliated to different denominations or religions. Among the Irish parents interviewed, there were a small number of cases where parents did not share religious affiliation, but variation in religious practices was more frequent. Similarly, where couples were interviewed together in Scotland, they were rarely found to have similar outlooks on religion. For some parents, a lack of shared beliefs with partners was perceived as a hindrance to the effective transmission of religious/moral beliefs to children. In the case of some parents in Ireland and Scotland who were actively trying to impart a particular religious faith to their children, there was the sense that if partners did not practise, this would increase the likelihood of challenging behaviour on the part of children. However, this latter issue did not emerge as a theme in Flanders. Similarly, the German religious parents did not regard religious agreement of the partners as equally important, but they emphasised their agreement regarding values as crucial.

Gender differences emerged in the role of parents in faith formation, in keeping with patterns found in international survey research on religious participation (see Chapter 2). In Scotland, Flanders and Ireland, mothers are generally reported as being more involved in religious practice than fathers. Similarly, among Catholic families in Malta, mothers undertook most of the faith formation duties, with only a minority of fathers practising. In contrast, no such gender differences were evident in the German sample, in keeping with national patterns reported in Chapter 2. Where neither parent took on the role of faith formation, grandparents often assumed

responsibility for passing on the faith. However, there seems to be some evidence that for Muslim children across a number of the countries, both mothers and fathers take on the role of faith formation.

#### *4.3.2 The communication of religious/moral views to children*

For parents, imparting moral beliefs and values is usually seen as part of the general process of child-rearing. Among those with particular religious beliefs, parents seek to communicate these beliefs through formal and, more commonly, informal methods. Commonalities emerged in terms of the nature of the religious practices parents engaged in with their children, both formal and informal. Many parents across the five countries reporting attended religious services (with varying degrees of regularity), reading religious texts (such as the Bible and the Qur'an), fasting (during Lent and Ramadan), saying prayers (especially at night), and the presence of religious symbols and practices.

In the formal dimension, parents reported taking children to religious services, though the regularity to which this occurred (particularly outside particular feasts and festivals) varied widely. Catholic parents in both Malta and Ireland reported seeking child-friendly masses, sometimes travelling beyond their local parish in order to access a mass which was more appealing to their child. Some Maltese Catholic parents expressed dissatisfaction with formal Church-based services which engaged in religious practices which they felt were unattractive to children, thereby failing to support parents' efforts to encourage faith formation on the part of children. A number of children in Scotland, Malta and Ireland were actively involved in religious services (e.g. as altar servers or in the choir) and some attended after-school religion classes. In Ireland, after-school participation was principally found among children attending the Church of Ireland and Educate Together schools, which do not engage in sacramental preparation within the school day. In addition, a number of Muslim children attended Qur'an school. In Malta, the majority of Catholic children also attended after-school catechism classes twice a week. The transmission of religious/moral beliefs more commonly happened at the informal level among Scottish families, through family practice and after-school activities. In some cases, parents took a more active role in ensuring children's engagement with organised religion through church attendance and attendance at Sunday school. In Flanders, a number of Muslim attended Qur'an school while a Protestant child attended Sunday school. Most Catholic parents were dissatisfied with Church-based services and therefore frequently decided not to attend mass. As in Scotland, the transmission of religious/moral beliefs more commonly happened at the informal level, namely via prayers and devotional rituals. Only on particular occasions (such as feasts or rites of passage) did parents and children engage with organised religion.

Age also impacted on the nature of parent-child interaction in relation to beliefs and values. Consequently, while parents frequently reported engaging in more overt, religious-based activities with their children when they were younger (such as bedtime prayers and reading books of a religious nature), this only continued to occur with older children in a minority of families, generally among the more strongly religiously affiliated. For Muslim families, however, it was more common for children to continue to be formally instructed by their parents in terms of prescribed greetings, ritual ablutions, prayers and the Qur'an.

In terms of communication, rather than parents themselves initiating conversations of a religious nature with their children in an effort to impart particular

religious and values messages, Irish parents reported that older children generally raised the issue of religion through questions. In terms of this child-initiated communication, children's exposure to religious matters at school often played a role in prompting these questions. In fact, Maltese and some Flemish parents observed that school-based religious education provided an important basis for discussion with their children. They asserted that without this prompt, they felt that the opportunities to discuss such matters with their children would be reduced. Religious festivals were also seen as prompting discussion among German families. In Flanders, both parents and children, except Muslims, reported that conversations of a religious nature took place only infrequently. If the issue was raised, everyday experiences or rituals as well as significant family events (such as the death of a grandparent, for example) were seen as prompting discussion.

On the whole, however, rather than perceiving religion as a significant subject for discussion, Irish parents instead tended to emphasise the importance of creating space to support family communication, with religion simply one topic which might then emerge. Similarly, some Scottish and German parents highlighted the fact that they routinely sat down with their children and discussed a range of topics, including religion.

#### *4.3.3 Parents' perspectives on children's agency*

Some parents (in Ireland, Scotland and Germany) expressed the view that they would like their children to choose their own religious orientation. In Flanders, this was the case for non-Muslim parents (Catholic and secular belief), but not for Muslim parents. Muslim parents could not imagine that their children would choose another religion than their own.

Parents' approaches to preparing children for this 'choice' differed, often as a consequence of their own perspective on religion. Some parents sought to educate their children about their own particular faith, while others sought to expose them to diverse religious beliefs. This latter pattern was evident in Scotland and, to some extent, Ireland. Age played a factor in parents' assertions of children's agency in relation to religion, with parents more willing to permit older children to stop practising, whilst expecting higher levels of conformity on the part of younger children. Irish parents often felt it was important to encourage younger children to continue to engage in religious practice – anxious to provide them with a religious grounding from which they could develop their own religious outlook in later life. Similarly, Scottish and German parents were rarely authoritarian in insisting their children adopt a particular type of religion. However, the majority of religious parents did express the desire for their children to develop a love of their faith.

Among Catholic Maltese families, while children's input in relation to the degree to which they engaged in religious practice was permitted, by contrast, religious beliefs were characterised as less mutable. Therefore, children's challenges to their family's beliefs were more difficult for parents to accept. Consequently, while children could choose not to practise, this was expected to occur whilst remaining within the confines of the family religion. Similarly, a liberal Muslim family in Scotland were content to allow their children to choose whether to fast or pray, providing these choices were made within a framework of respect for their religion. This notion of 'choice' was also a frequent theme in the narratives of Muslim parents in Malta, particularly in terms of allowing children to choose the pace of their engagement in religious practices (such as fasting or wearing the *hijab*).

Interestingly, children were not cast in the role of simply passive recipients of parental knowledge. In some cases, children were characterised as sources of expertise about religion. For instance, a small number of Irish parents whose children attended the Educate Together school referred to the knowledge children had gained through their study of world religions, knowledge which children were then able to impart to parents. Similarly, in some German families, especially those attending faith schools, parents and children were found to be mutual religious educators. The convert mothers of Muslim children in Malta also noted how their children's religious development enhanced their own knowledge of beliefs and practices. Consequently, perspectives on religious education practices within the family need not inevitably cast children as simply the recipients of parental knowledge. In Germany, mothers who had left their Church some time ago reported on their children's "almost enviable" capacity to believe in God and angels, and were motivated by them to return to a Christian church. In Flanders, many children used parental knowledge to construct their own religious imagination, prayers and rituals. Muslim children were able to handle the differences between what they learn at home and what they hear and see at school by making use of the flexibility which they regarded as being present in Islam and by drawing on their religious imagination. Using this flexibility and imagination, these children usually succeeded in combining different, sometimes divergent, worlds together into a single entity.

#### **4.4 The social construction of religious identity among children**

An original feature of the REMC study is its focus on children as active agents in their own religious formation (see Chapter 1). This section explores children's own beliefs and practices, their interaction with their parents regarding religious issues, and their perceptions of religious/moral education within the school context.

##### *4.4.1 Self-labelling of religious/moral beliefs and parent-child communication*

Like their parents, the children interviewed for the study indicated complex engagement with religious beliefs and practices, a complexity which could not easily be reduced to formal religious categories. Children's religious identity also emerged as fluid. As with their parents, some Muslim children were more likely than other children to identify themselves as clearly belonging to a particular faith group.

A number of children in Ireland and Germany describe their beliefs as different to those of their parents, further illustrating the heterogeneity of religious affiliation within the family. In Malta, a number of the Muslim children had Catholic mothers, whilst many Catholic children had fathers (and sometimes even mothers) who no longer practised. In Flanders, among children with a Catholic background, a number of interesting differences from their parents are noticeable. Most Catholic parents locate the moral instruction which they give at home in a socio-cultural Christian framework. However, children never refer to this framework, but perceive the values they learn at home as secular. This may reflect the fact that parents rarely explicitly articulate the link between the values they teach and the Christian framework.

Even where children use similar self-descriptions to those of their parents, they do not do uncritically. Many of the children interviewed reported a personalised sense of their own religion, with religion providing a sense of meaning and an

explanation of their world. Some groups of children (e.g. in Flanders) found it difficult to describe their and their parents' beliefs, as parents rarely explicitly articulate their religious affiliation and views. For parents with secular beliefs, religion was not an issue at home; Catholic families had an underlying socio-cultural Christian framework but this was rarely explicitly articulated. Similarly, in Malta, many Catholic children had difficulty naming their own and their parents' religious belonging. In the latter case, there seemed to be a combination of a taken for granted 'Christianity' (which was the term used more than 'Catholic'), which in the absence of a strong presence of 'others' and in a hegemonic culture need no explicit labelling, and a lack of knowledge. Muslim children in Malta and Flanders did not have the same difficulty in calling themselves Muslim and their religion Islam. They referred to both, frequently starting sentences with 'as a Muslim' or 'in Islam we'. They were also clear about what distinguished them from others, including teachers, other relatives and friends.

In Scotland, many of the children with secular beliefs struggled more than those with religious beliefs in terms of how to describe their views. In the two Catholic schools, there was a strong sense of cultural heritage associated with religion, and some children expressed a fear that abandoning a parent's religion would lead to isolation from the community.

The children in the study – except in Germany - generally felt that children should be able to choose their own religion, though many moderated this by saying such choice should occur at a certain age. However, the degree of choice actually accorded to children in their day-to-day lives varied considerably. Most of the German children surprisingly answered that they were neither able nor willing to choose their own religion as they rather regard it as a cultural and family heritage rather than as a matter of choice.

The majority of children reported talking to their parents about beliefs and values at least occasionally. Such conversations can be prompted by particular religious festivals or by discussion in RME class. Explicit discussion of religious beliefs appeared more prevalent in families with a strong affiliation to specific religious institutions and/or where minority faith families were taking a dominant role in faith formation (in the absence of school-based provision). In Malta, both Catholic and Muslim children talk continuously, to their mothers especially, about school and about moral dilemmas, the latter often raised as a result of television viewing.

#### *4.4.2 Children's perceptions of religious/moral education and religious diversity at school*

Children in the case-study schools were generally positive about the religious and moral education they received. They liked much of the content of the course as well as the more active teaching methodology generally used in RME class. Across the five countries, many children singled out 'stories' as their favourite aspect of RME, and children appeared to use these accounts to make sense of their own lives and the decisions facing them. Regardless of the form taken by RME, children felt it was a subject in which they could actively engage and be listened to. As with other school subjects, children's attitudes to RME class varies by teacher, with children critical of classes where the content or approach is 'boring'.

The nature of the primary school system across the case-study countries means that children may have different levels of exposure to diversity, depending on the school they attend.

In Flanders, children in more mixed intake schools are aware of differences in beliefs. They also discuss these differences, for example, on the creation of the earth and the existence of God, in the playground. This informal discussion is seen by children as ‘freer’ than class-based discussion. In these discussions, all children express curiosity, and sometimes surprise, about other beliefs. In some cases, these discussions can lead to tensions, in which case the children tend to fall back on the beliefs of their parents. An additional issue raised by Muslim children was the silence about Islam evident in Flemish schools that do not provide Islamic education.

In Germany, children all seem to be aware who attends which RE in the public schools, and interpret all those who attend Catholic RE as Catholics (which is not always the case, as there are also religious minority children attending Protestant or Catholic RE in some cases). Parallel Christian RME classes make the children aware of different denominations, but there is no detailed knowledge about what this difference really means, apart from concrete aspects such as sacramental preparation. Lack of knowledge of non-Christian religions, for example, Islam or Hinduism, is much more evident, since these are not really addressed in Christian RME. In the faith schools, religious differences are generally not addressed explicitly, apart from the separation into “active” and “passive” participants of religious services. The exception to the latter pattern occurs in the Protestant school, where diversity is used explicitly as a learning tool to encourage understanding and empathy between children from different backgrounds.

With the exception of the children in the Church schools, all of the Maltese children are very aware that others, especially other children, have ‘different’ beliefs. Muslim children in the Muslim Independent School know a good deal about Christianity, since their class teachers, many of their mothers, and relatives and friends are Christian. Catholic children in the State and Independent schools know that other children who do not take RME (but are still in class) have different beliefs. They talk to these others about their beliefs, and sometimes compete about whose is the ‘best God’. Their knowledge about specific beliefs is, however, poor. Their awareness comes from direct contact with others, from television or parents’ comments. With the exception of those in the Muslim Independent School, none of this awareness comes from school-based RME or activities.

In Scotland, children attending Catholic schools clearly perceived the Catholic faith to be the dominant faith in the school. Students of other or no faith were perceived as different and the children interviewed (all Catholic) believed that these pupils felt different in the school context. Generally, pupils in non-denominational schools appeared more aware and accepting of pupils of other or no faith.

In Ireland, the different focus of RME across schools had implications for children’s knowledge and awareness of other belief systems. In the Educate Together school, learning about world religions was an explicit part of the curriculum, a feature which was seen positively by many children. Children attending the Church of Ireland school reported some knowledge of other religions, but this was much less a feature of RME class than in the Educate Together school. In contrast, children attending Catholic schools were less likely to mention learning about other religions, a gap in their knowledge upon which some commented negatively.

#### **4.5 Home-school interaction in relation to beliefs and values**

This section explores the degree to which continuity or discontinuity is evident between home and school in relation to moral and religious values. Some international

studies have highlighted the potential tensions between school and home in relation to religious beliefs and values, especially if parents and teachers do not share the same religious affiliation or place the same emphasis on religious beliefs and practices (see, for example, Abbas, 2003; Jacobson, 1998; Vertovec and Rogers, 2004; Zine, 2001). To what extent this is the case in the countries participating in this study will be explored in the following subsections.

#### 4.5.1 *Perceived roles of the home and school in religious/moral formation*

International research has indicated a very strong association between parental religious beliefs and practices and those of their children. Parents are seen as the direct or indirect primary influence on their children's beliefs (Cornwall, 1989; Gautier and Singelmann, 1997; Helve, 1991; Sherkat and Elliott, 1999). This section takes a closer look at how parents and schools perceive their role in imparting religious and moral education to children.

Research for the REMC study found that parents and schools frequently hold divergent views on their respective roles in relation to imparting religious/moral beliefs and values. In general, teachers and principals across the case-study countries perceived their role as more general and supplementary, believing the principal educator to be the family. A distinction was evident between the *religious and moral development/formation* of children and the provision of *religious/moral education*. Many teachers and principals felt that *faith formation* was the responsibility of parents. In Ireland and Germany, many teachers highlighted the need for greater parental involvement in the moral and religious development of the child, feeling that too much responsibility in this respect falls upon schools. In Ireland, preparation for sacraments, in particular, was seen to place extra demands on teachers. Not surprisingly, the teachers in a multi-denominational school in Ireland noted that schools have a role to play in the moral and ethical development of the child but not in faith formation. Compared to the other countries, it seemed that schools in Malta felt more strongly about their formative role (while also admitting that the ultimate responsibility lay with parents). The schools perceived their role in providing both *religious education* and *values formation*. In non-denominational schools in Scotland the school was expected to provide an overview of all world religions but not play a role in religious and moral formation. As in some faith schools in other countries (Ireland and Malta), there was some tension regarding the respective role of home and school in Scottish Catholic schools, with some teachers reporting that parents 'left religion up to the school'.

In general, the perceptions of parents about their role and that of the school were more complex. As was the case with teachers, several parents differentiated between *religious education* and *faith formation*. In Ireland and Germany, divergent views were evident among parents in what constituted 'the best place' to teach children about religion and morals/values. For some parents, school was characterised as the 'best place' for *religious education* to take place. However, in the case of families whose religious outlook was at variance with the school's ethos/identity, parents often perceived the role of faith formation as residing within the family, with some minority faith parents (e.g. Muslim parents) seeing faith formation as a 'private matter'. Of note is the fact that parents whose children attend a multi-denominational school in Ireland were more likely to see *faith formation* as appropriate to the home as opposed to the school domain, with many welcoming the 'learning about religion' approach taken in these schools.

However, even where a school's ethos matched a family's religious identity, it was not inevitable that parents saw the school as having a role to play in instructing children in a particular religion. Flemish parents (Catholic as well as secular) generally supported the approach adopted by the school (see Section 4.2) and were satisfied with RME classes. However, there was some debate on the role of the religion in school in general (see Section 4.1), especially in the case of Muslim parents with children in Catholic schools who would like the introduction of Islamic educational provision (for some of them, schools have an important place to play in *faith formation*). However, for Flemish parents there is no apparent tension between the perceived role of school and home as providers of *moral and religious education* as religion is not a determining factor in school choice. While in general, *faith formation* was considered to be the responsibility of the parents, some parents in Germany were happy to delegate the *religious socialisation/faith formation* to the school, either because they did not feel competent enough to do it themselves or due to lack of time. In Scotland, the non-denominational schools were expected to provide an overview of all world religions but not play a role in *religious and moral formation*. However, some parents would have preferred greater involvement from the school in this respect, and parents sending their children to Catholic schools believed that the school should take greater responsibility in instilling religious values in children.

In Malta, most parents felt that schools should have a *formative role*, especially in providing moral and values formation. They saw their own role as relating to everyday religious practices and the transmission of family values through more informal conversations with children. Some parents were critical of schools that did not provide *religious education* for minority faith children (citing an over-emphasis on majority faith culture). Parents, who either were no longer practising Catholics or felt that faith formation should be the responsibility of the home, were more likely to criticise the faith formation approach taken by schools. Muslim parents were less likely to separate the roles of home and school in religious formation. For them, following the Islamic tradition in their daily lives was expected to continue in the school. There was most congruence between the perceived roles of school and parents of children in faith schools in Malta.

#### 4.5.2 Home-school contact in relation to RME

A common theme, which emerged from a number of interviews with parents in Ireland, Flanders, Scotland, Malta and Germany, was that many parents had relatively limited knowledge of the religious and moral education (RME) taught at school. In Ireland, the shift in the nature of the curriculum of RME since parents' own schooling was a factor in this lack of awareness. In many instances (including in Scotland, Ireland and Flanders), homework appeared to be the main information channel for many parents about what was happening in the school. As children frequently received less homework in RME than in other subjects, parents had less awareness of the content of the subject. In Flanders, most parents seemed to think that RME is mostly about other religions, in contrast to the views of their children. Parents whose children attended the Muslim Independent School in Malta seemed to be the best informed about the religious education provided in the school.

The relative unfamiliarity with the teaching of RME across the countries could also be due to the fact that there was little contact between school and family with regard to religion (except with minority faith parents in some instances: e.g. Muslims



in Flanders). In Germany, the main concern of the parents interviewed seemed to be moral issues (like bullying or prevention of violent behaviour), and this was reflected in the nature of their communication with the school. In general, the German case-study schools felt that parents did not attach much importance to religious practice (some parents in denominational schools being an exception). Whilst there was no formally established contact regarding RME between parents and schools in Malta (parents have never been consulted about what type of RME they would like to see in school), there was some communication between parents and schools with regard to religion. In most cases, this happened when children first enrolled in the school, a situation which was mirrored by the experiences of many Irish parents. For example, the Catholic and Muslim faith schools in Ireland made it clear before admission that the schools had a strong focus on religious immersion. Parents could also contact the school if they wanted their children to be withdrawn from the religious education class (see Section 4.2).

There was some variance in the levels of satisfaction with RME among the parents participating in the study, often relating to parents' own background. Parental religious/moral beliefs and values often informed (but did not determine) school choice (see Section 4.1), with many parents opting for schools that reflected their own world view. However, in Ireland, some (Catholic) parents were somewhat critical of certain aspects of the curriculum, feeling that the emphasis in religion class was "too woolly" or that the denominational aspect of religious education had become more diluted and less "strict". For others, the shift away from a more didactic approach was seen as welcome. Those German parents who had some knowledge about school-based RME were broadly satisfied with the methods used and the lesson content, adding, however, that basic terms used there (like "Protestant" or "Catholic", for example) did not mean anything to their children and were not explained at school, being treated as self-evident. As many Scottish parents interviewed as part of this study stated that they did not have much knowledge of the RME curriculum, they found it difficult to comment on their satisfaction with RME. Not surprisingly, some parents of minority faith were most dissatisfied with the RME taught in their children's school. While most parents in Flanders were satisfied with RME, some Muslim parents would have preferred more integration of their beliefs into the existing RME curriculum.

#### *4.5.3 Respect for religious/moral diversity within schools*

The majority of parents across all five countries (largely from the majority faith/culture) felt that the school respected their religious and moral beliefs. This was not surprising as the majority had opted for a school type that reflected their background. However, minority faith parents were more likely to be critical of the inflexibility of the school in catering for their needs. For example, Muslim parents in Germany explicitly mentioned the absence of Islam (and other religions) from RME. Similarly, German parents who did not share the same religious affiliation as the school (e.g. Protestants in a Catholic school) were critical of having to sign a consent form that obliged their children to take part in Catholic religious education and services. Although Scottish parents of children in non-denominational schools were generally content with the school's perspective on religion, there were occasions when parents of secular and minority religious beliefs became concerned about RME teaching. This was particularly so when they felt that the school was no longer educating about religions in general but was, instead, promoting a particular religion

as offering ‘the truth’. One Catholic parent of a child in a non-denominational school also complained that inadequate attention was paid to the differences between Catholicism and Protestantism, since they have been ‘bundled together’ under the Christian umbrella. The parents in Malta seemed to be most satisfied with the school and its approach to teaching RME. There were no major differences across groups of parents or types of school. However, parents of Muslim children not in the Islamic faith school felt that their needs were not adequately met by the State sector.

The REMC study also explored parents’ perceptions on religious diversity in schools. In general, parents from the majority faith/belief group felt broadly satisfied with the approach taken by the schools, as long as it did not entail a major change in the school culture. However, the positive nature of the increasing diversity of Irish society was raised by a number of parents. Children’s exposure to diversity was considered to be “good for them”, particularly given the globalised nature of the world, as it was seen to enable them to understand the religious backgrounds which exist in other countries; diversity was seen to provide children with the opportunity to engage with people who possess different values and beliefs. However, concerns arose on the part of a small number of parents as to how accommodating or respecting the perspectives of those from minority/secular backgrounds might impact on the education of their own child. Consequently, these parents challenged the notion that it is incumbent on the majority to adapt so as to alter the status quo.

In Malta, parents were ambiguous about how schools managed diversity, which in part reflected their own uncertainty about the issue. As in Ireland, the majority of parents valued diversity and thought it was ‘healthy’ to have children of different ethnic groups and religions among the student body. Nonetheless, across all schools there were parents who were more inclusive, with others barely tolerant of diversity. Most Maltese parents disapproved of not providing a faith education for minority children, and were uncomfortable that the only option for these children was to remain in class during Catholic RME. However, there were limits to this positive attitude to diversity - it was considered acceptable as long as it did not require the majority faith group to change. Some parents (e.g. parents of Catholic children in schools with minority Muslim children, and even those in the Church schools) were somewhat concerned that if their children learnt too much about Islam or other faiths, they would become ‘confused’. In principle, however, they were in favour of an intercultural model and advocated it for State schools (this at the same time as preferring the separatist model for their own children).

In Germany, most parents with children attending public schools felt that their beliefs were respected; the exception related to some parents who criticised the absence of a “Basic knowledge about all religions” approach. In the Catholic schools, some parents raised the issue of having to consent to a ‘Catholic education’, even if their own belief system differed. Interestingly, in Germany no Muslim parent, and only one Muslim child, favoured having Islamic education as a separate school subject. In Flanders, most parents automatically assumed that their beliefs were congruent with the school and thus felt that their beliefs were respected. They also welcomed religious diversity at school and reported that this diversity was an important means for their children to learn how to live with others. Some parents, however, criticised Muslim parents for what they termed their low levels of school participation or reluctance to speak Dutch. Muslim parents in Flanders reported the differences between the school’s belief and their belief, but most of them accepted these differences. This choice was defended on the basis of the efforts that the school made towards them. A number of Muslim parents mentioned in this connection that

the school was ready to listen to them and take account of their religious food rules. Some Muslim parents in schools without Islam lessons, however, criticised the absence of Islamic education.

#### *4.5.4 Tensions between home and school over religious/moral issues*

The previous sections showed that some tensions could be observed between home and school with regard to religious and moral issues. This section explores this topic in greater detail.

There were relatively few explicit tensions evident in Ireland and Scotland. In fact, in Ireland, the majority of parents did not perceive any tension between the religious, moral and value messages children received at school versus the worldview they themselves imparted at home. Parents whose children attended a multi-denominational school were happy with the philosophy of the school whereby children are exposed to religion but not 'indoctrinated'. Some parents also expressed their readiness to visit the school if an issue did arise. However, a question-mark emerges over the extent of some parents' knowledge of the actual nature of the religious, moral and value messages propagated at their child(ren)'s school (as discussed in a previous section).

The primarily denominational nature of schools in Ireland resulted in difficult decisions for some parents, particularly in terms of children's participation in religious education classes. A Muslim father deliberately chose a multi-denominational school rather than a Christian school to avoid the necessity of taking his daughter out of RME classes, a practice which he felt would engender alienation. In fact, a common theme among some minority faith/secular parents interviewed was the fear that they would isolate or differentiate their children from their peers. Some parents from minority religious backgrounds reported specific incidents where the school displayed a lack of sensitivity to their religious beliefs. Significantly though, disjoint between home and school was not necessarily perceived as problematic by parents.

As already noted, there did not seem to be evidence for explicit tensions in relation to religious education in Scotland. The main area of contention (as reported by school principals) was in relation to sex education. For example, Muslim children (especially girls) had been withdrawn from sex education in at least two of the five schools.

In Flanders, the interviews indicated that, regarding the core (religious) ritual repertoire, the schools adopted an assimilation approach and assumed that children, regardless their religious background, should attend religious festivals. All of the children interviewed, Muslim children included, reported that they liked to participate in these school (religious) rituals. Nevertheless, an explicit tension could be identified between 'scientific secular' and religious worldviews. Most schools solved this tension by presenting these different worldviews separately or neutrally, thus avoiding a dialogue that would contrast different world views. Religious topics or questions were reserved for RME classes. In general, more explicit tensions between Muslim and other faith/belief groups emerged in relation to the use of religious symbols and to participation in specific feasts. There was also a fear on the part of the official schools that they may upset secular parents and consequently they tended to avoid the use of explicit religious symbols in schools.

Some explicit tensions could also be detected in Germany. This was evident by phrases used during the interviews (e.g. “our Turkish machos”, with gender equality a concern frequently mentioned by teachers and mothers, or mosques being considered as dubious institutions). There were also comments made about the children of religious minorities (Hindu, Muslim) and their desire to learn something about their own religion in the school and have it respectfully represented.

With Catholic children in all three school sectors in Malta, there was little sign of explicit tension between home and school over RME. Parents noted that they were more liberal than the school with regard to imparting some information (e.g. about gay relationships and divorce). Parents did not think their more liberal attitude was a problem and that children knew how to deal with any difference that may arise between this minimal difference between home and school values. Few of them had already discussed sex education with their children and would be happy to let the school do this first. A number of ‘discerning’ Catholics were aware that they were more likely to critique the establishment Church than school would be, whilst other more devout parents felt that some teachers lacked a commitment to the faith, thus possibly diminishing the religious experience of school-based faith formation (this was mostly the case in the Independent non-denominational school). Again, some tensions emerged between minority faith parents and school with regard to recognising their faith.

## **5. Conclusions**

The REMC study has shown the way in which the place of religion in the primary school system reflects the outcome of historical conflict and compromise. Institutional inertia can mean that these systems no longer reflect the religious profile and practice of the current population, and the structures in place may fail to keep pace with growing numbers of people with secular and/or minority faith beliefs. All five of the case-study countries have separate faith schools, although the representation of this sector varies from less than 2 per cent to 98 per cent of primary schools across the countries.

The structure of the primary school system shapes the context within which parents make choices about their children’s education. Religion emerges from the study as only one of a multiplicity of factors which guide choice of school. Not surprisingly, religion appears to be a more dominant factor in choice for families from a minority faith group. Even here religious affiliation plays a complex role since parents may wish to preserve their religious tradition but also to maintain cultural identity or provide a ‘safe haven’ to protect their children from being treated as different. Tensions in the school choice process are evident in two respects. Firstly, the educational systems provide for faith formation for Christian groups to a much greater extent than for non-Christian groups, and, even when faith formation is not an explicit goal of schooling, tacit Christian values and assumptions may be embedded in the school ethos. Furthermore, in two of the countries, Ireland and Malta, families with secular beliefs appear to have difficulties accessing schools with congruent belief systems, other than by ‘opting out’ of provision. A second source of tension, and perhaps one that has often been neglected in discussions of religion and schooling, is the mismatch between the fixed categorical sense in which faith schools (and RME provision) are generally organised (Catholic, Protestant, Muslim etc.) and the complex

and fluid way in which parents and children define and name their own religious identities.

Across the case-study schools, the nature of the religious/moral education provided for children is influenced, but not determined by, the type of school they attend. In faith schools, the RME curriculum is generally devised by the relevant religious authority. The position in State schools varies across countries. In NRW<sup>13</sup> (Germany) and Flanders, a parallel system of RME is in place, whereby students choose from among a number of different faith options and – in the case of Flanders – a secular ethical education strand. However, not all religious groups are encompassed in this system, and in both countries, access to an Islamic education strand is comparatively rare. In Scotland, in contrast, State schools provide a RME curriculum which emphasises ‘learning about religions’ and an exploration of ethical values. Across all countries, the communication of religious/moral values is not confined to RME class. Faith schools engage in an array of practices, including prayer, attending religious services and celebrating religious festivals, which express and reinforce the religious identity of the school. The posited ‘neutrality’ of State schools is found to cover a continuum, from a more or less explicit espousal of socio-cultural Christianity to a position of critical interculturalism.

The formal and informal aspects of school identity interact to shape the treatment of ‘difference’ within the school and also influence children’s own awareness of religious diversity. Children attending faith schools and receiving ‘instruction’ in a specific religion tend to report less knowledge of, and contact with, other religious/moral belief systems, except in Germany where the intake of publicly-maintained faith schools was fairly multi-religious. This pattern is particularly evident where faith schools form a minority of primary schools since a dominance of mono-faith schools (as in Ireland, for example) results *de facto* in greater diversity in the school population. Where children choose between different kinds of RME within the same school, or where they ‘opt out’ of existing provision, such choices often serve to signal difference by labelling children’s beliefs in a fixed, categorical way.

School is not the only, and by no means the most, important site for the communication of religious/moral beliefs. An innovative feature of the REMC study is its exploration of the construction of children’s religious identity in the interface between home and school. In contrast to some previous studies of religious socialisation, children are found to be active agents in their own belief formation. Children tend to have complex and fluid religious identities, which respond to, and act upon, their environment. Religious beliefs and values are just one topic among many others discussed by children and parents. Furthermore, such communication is bidirectional, since many parents report a reinforcement of their own faith or the acquisition of new knowledge as a result of this interaction. In situations where the belief system of the parents and the school do not match, parents appear to adopt a more proactive role in explicit discussion of religious beliefs and practices with their children. The children interviewed were broadly positive about religious and moral education at school, regardless of the specific form it takes. School-based RME is seen to allow for a more active engagement in learning, the chance to offer their own opinions and the opportunity to hear stories which help them make sense of their lives.

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<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that the situation in many other Länder is different from that in North Rhein Westphalia.

The REMC study indicated relatively little explicit tension between home and school in relation to religious and moral beliefs and values. In some cases, parents ‘accommodate’ to the identity of the school, preferring to ‘go along with’ existing structures rather than single out their children as different. Interestingly, for the most part, parents in the study indicated little detailed knowledge of the content of school-based religious/moral education and the kinds of values fostered by the school. This lack of knowledge in itself may serve to reduce the potential for explicit tension or conflict. In the rare cases where conflict was evident, it tended to centre on a Christian/non-Christian (chiefly Muslim) dichotomy, reflecting a religious and cultural distance in relation to issues such as food, clothing and sex education. It should be noted, however, that the absence of explicit conflict over religion and schooling at the micro level should not obscure the indication of tensions and accommodations at a number of levels in the education system, tensions over the structure of schools, the place of faith schools, curriculum content, and school engagement with diversity.

## **6. Issues for policy**

In this section, we consider some of the challenges for policy at EU and national level raised by the REMC research study.

### **6.1 Religion as a human rights/equality issue**

Until recently, religion simply did not feature as an equality issue at European level, or in most member States, where the focus was much more likely to be on ethnicity or the status of immigrants (Hellyer, 2009). Over the past few years, there has been a growing interest in the place of religion in education and society, with ongoing debate about whether it should be seen as a source of social cohesion or division (Sen, 2006; Walford, 2008). This is prompted in part by a growth in the number of people identifying with world religions other than Christianity, a decline in religious identification amongst indigenous populations, and a fear of religious fundamentalism (Sen, 2006). In addition, European and domestic equality and human rights legislation has enabled legal challenges against discriminatory practices to be mounted. In some countries, such as Scotland, there have been ongoing concerns about the relative position of Protestants and Catholics, with attention to the position of Muslims emerging only very recently (Hussain and Miller, 2007). In Germany, which has the second largest Muslim population in Western Europe, there has been long-standing concern about the position of Muslims, particularly with regard to the citizenship status of Turkish Gastarbeiter, who began to settle in the country from the 1950s onwards to fill gaps in the labour market. Muslims now make up the largest minority ethno-religious group in Europe (Nielsen, 2004), and there continue to be challenges with regard to their social status, exemplified, for example, in ongoing debates about the rights of Muslim women and girls to wear the hijab in public in France and Germany. Many of these debates spill over into the field of education, and in the following paragraphs we consider some of the policy issues raised by our research.

## **6.2 Religion and cultural practices in schools**

Religion is most visibly played out in the cultural practices of a school in terms of dress and food. In addition, modifications to the formal curriculum at times of religious festivals such as Ramadan are indicative of schools' efforts to embrace religious diversity.

Of these practices, our findings indicate that dress was by far the most difficult issue for our case-study schools to deal with. In Scotland, primary schools with significant Muslim populations generally negotiated with the local imam and parents in order to achieve a shariah-compliant school uniform. In schools with uniform, this generally included reaching an agreement on the colour of hijab which girls would wear. More restrictive items of attire, however, were banned. In Ireland, decisions on uniform were made at the school level but wearing the hijab generally appeared to be permitted. In Malta, the Minister of Education has stated in interviews that she does not object to female students wearing the hijab, but as yet no official policy has been communicated to schools. In some other countries, such as Flanders, by way of contrast, it appeared that the hijab was not generally allowed to be worn at school.

As noted earlier in this report, it would appear that many countries have found it relatively easy to deal with issues of diversity arising in relation to food practices. Our research indicates that, in most of the study countries, halal meat was included as an option in school meals, where provided, or children brought in their own food for lunch. Arrangements for fasting during Ramadan appeared to be rather more difficult to deal with. In Scotland, for example, some primary schools made available a separate room for Muslim pupils to use during Ramadan, so that they would not have to come into contact with other pupils who were eating or smell food being prepared. Also, Scotland appeared to be the only country where, at least in some schools, older Muslim children who were fasting were allowed a modified school timetable, so that they would not be expected to undertake vigorous activities such as Physical Education in the middle of a fast.

## **6.3 Religion and the curriculum**

As noted earlier in this report, the position of religion in State school curricula is generally a result of long-term negotiations between indigenous Christian groups, generally Catholics and Protestants, and the State. Until relatively recently, little attention has been paid to the beliefs of religious minorities and those of no religious persuasion. The research indicates that, as a result of these historical processes, the teaching of Christianity is privileged in almost all countries, and other world religions and secular belief systems are dealt with in much less depth. The dominance of Christian groups is reflected not just in religious and moral education, but also in areas such as sex education. Whilst Muslim parents would generally be permitted to withdraw their children from sex education classes if they disapproved of the content, there was no expectation that the curriculum in this area would be devised with their belief systems in mind. Even where religion as a school subject does not emphasise faith formation, our research indicates that school values and practices may be Christian from a socio-cultural perspective. Thus, the celebration of Christmas assumes a taken-for-granted character within schools while the recognition of other religious festivals is more variable.

## **6.4 Equality and employment**

A further important area where there may be clashes between equal opportunities legislation and the demands of faith communities concerns the employment of teachers. Our research indicates the imprint of the particular religious denomination of the school on teachers, with issues arising around teacher recruitment to faith schools in particular. For example, it is a requirement for all teachers in Catholic State schools in Ireland and Scotland to be approved by the bishop. In Malta, a similar requirement is made of all those who teach in primary schools, since these are teachers of the Catholic religion, as well as of teachers of religion in Catholic State, Church and Independent Schools. Catholic teachers in Scotland have to provide a reference from their parish priest to attest to the fact that he or she is known in the parish, and is a regular mass attendee. The Charter for Catholic Schools in Scotland further outlines ten elements of the Church's philosophy of education, and all teachers in Catholic schools, whether Catholic, Protestant, Muslim or of no faith, are expected to support them. Particularly in Scotland, these requirements have been controversial, and the teachers' trade union has drawn attention to possible clashes with legislation prohibiting discrimination on grounds of religion, belief or sexual identity. In Scotland, a number of cases of discrimination have been brought under the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003. This is an area where there are likely to be more legal challenges in the future.

## **6.5 Children's rights perspectives**

In many European countries, in line with political agendas associated with marketisation and consumerism, there has been a growing focus on the rights of parents to choose the school which their child attends and to have some input into the curriculum and pedagogy. Human rights legislation also underpins the rights of parents to have their children educated in accordance with their religious beliefs. Where the State offers no alternatives to a particular type of religious education, except opt-out, to parents and children of either minority faith or none, as with Muslims in Malta, the right to choice is severely restricted. Children's rights to choice and autonomy have almost always been subservient to the rights of parents. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the other hand, emphasises that children have the right to participate in decisions that affect them, including the school they attend and the way in which education is delivered in school. Cairns (2006) argues that whilst there has been a change in the social policy rhetoric in many European countries with regard to the rights of the child, it is less easy to find evidence of the participation rights of children and young people being respected in reality. This appears to be the case in the field of religious and moral education, where, for example, parents have the right in many countries to request that their child be withdrawn, but such opt-out rights are not accorded to children. This is, of course, also the case in relation to sex and relationship education, where parents, but not children, may request an opt-out. There is clearly the potential here for a clash between the rights of the parents and the rights of the child, since the child has the right to access the curriculum in full, but this right may be trumped by the right of parents to have their religious beliefs respected.

Questions also arise in relation to the rights of children to define their own religious identity. At the moment, there is, in many European countries, a tacit belief that children inherit their religious beliefs from their parents, so that, for example, if



the parents are Jewish, then the children will inherit this religious identity. Findings from our research indicate that in most countries parents expect their children to choose their own religious identity, but at some unspecified point in the future. However, children themselves are found to engage critically with the belief systems of their parents and in some cases espouse a different religious perspective to that of their parents. Potential differences in the perspectives of parents and children are rarely taken into account in school-based religious/moral education provision.

Summarising social policy trends with regard to children's rights, Prout and Tisdall (2006) maintain that children are increasingly recognised as separate entities from their parents, families and households, and that children's needs, concerns and rights can be different from those of adults, even their parents. Clearly, in relation to choice of religion and religious expression through education, there is significant potential for the rights of parents and children to be in tension. The way in which these tensions are managed in the future will almost certainly have a bearing on the treatment of religion in education.

## **6.6 Challenges for multiculturalism**

Hellyer (2009) notes that although European history and culture have been shaped for centuries by the interactions of Jews, Christians and Muslims, the advent of mass migration after the Second World War has produced new challenges for multiculturalism. In the 1950s and 1960s, migrant workers arriving in European countries from many parts of the world, including North Africa, Pakistan and India, were expected to assimilate into the 'host' culture, with adaptation being a one-way process. Multiculturalism and interculturalism raise questions about the extent of accommodation which may be required by all cultural groups living within a given country, and the extent to which the expectation of adaptation should be placed on the indigenous community, as well as more recent arrivals. Questions have also been asked about the extent to which it is desirable, or feasible, for immigrant communities to remain separate from the indigenous population, as have the Amish in the USA. Events such as the bombing of the London underground on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005 and of Glasgow airport in 2007 have raised questions about the extent to which multiculturalism and community cohesion are compatible (see, for example, the findings of the English Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007). Clearly, different European countries have developed a range of approaches to multiculturalism, with France maintaining a Statist approach with little acceptance of multiculturalism. By way of contrast, other countries, such as Scotland, have made considerable efforts to promote multicultural principles, for example, through the public advertising campaign which adopted the slogan 'One Scotland, many cultures'.

The notion of multiculturalism has itself been contested on a number of grounds, especially its neglect of power relations (Lentin, 2001). Some commentators argue instead for an approach based on 'critical interculturalism', which recognises, respects and critically interrogates diversity, rather than simply 'tolerating' difference (Baker et al., 2006; Spajić-Vrkaš, 2004). It is clear that schools are a crucial site for children encountering and learning about diversity. Our research has shown that in many countries children's opportunities to learn about religious diversity depend on the type of school they attend. Thus, children attending a faith school tend to be less likely to learn about other worldviews. Children in our study were broadly positive about the opportunities afforded by religious/moral education classes to engage in discussion about beliefs and values, and expressed interest in learning about and from

a range of religious/moral perspectives (see Jackson, 2004, on how RME teaching can contribute to the goals of intercultural education). Our research has also shown how the treatment of diversity differs between and within school sectors in the case-study countries. In some cases, the only available option for minority students was to 'opt out' of formal religious/moral education; in other cases, schools attempted to embrace and value diversity through their day-to-day classes and activities. A further issue relates to teachers' own awareness of diversity, with many teachers in the study countries expressing less knowledge of non-Christian religions than of Christian beliefs and/or not feeling adequately prepared to deal with diversity in the classroom (see Hickling-Hudson, 2004). Thus, broader policy issues regarding the treatment of diversity play out in a very important way at the school level.

Clearly, the growing religious diversity of European societies raises many questions with regard to which groups should define fairness and equity in relation to cultural representation. As the population of all countries changes and becomes increasingly diverse, it is likely that there will be growing challenges to the idea that the indigenous population has a greater right to define cultural norms than more recent arrivals. This raises important questions concerning national identity, which all members of European societies will have to address. The part played by religion(s) in defining national identity, in schools and other social policy arena, will be at the centre of such debates.

### **6.7 School ownership and governance**

Linked with issues of multiculturalism are questions regarding the position of faith schools in different European countries, and the extent to which such schools should be able to define their own curriculum and pedagogy. As noted earlier, European countries tend to have different arrangements with regard to the funding of faith, as opposed to non-denominational, schools, often reflecting the outcome of historical disputes between different Christian groups and power plays between the State and the Church(es). In Scotland, for example, the vast majority of faith primary schools, representing a fifth of the total, are Catholic. This is the result of a nineteenth century settlement between the Scottish state and the Catholic Church, in recognition of the poverty and social marginalisation of Catholics in Scotland at this time. It is worth noting, however, that there is differential representation of religions among faith schools. In the study countries, only Ireland and Malta had separate Muslim faith schools, and in the Maltese case, the Muslim school was part of the independent sector, requiring parents to pay fees. This is in sharp contrast with the State's generous funding of Catholic Church faith schools in Malta.

The implications of the provision of separate faith schools for societal cohesion have been the subject of much debate across Europe. Kymlicka (2003), for example, points to a tension between the kind of schooling required to promote intercultural contact and awareness and the sort of school system required by norms of multicultural fairness. Furthermore, the requirement for religious schools in the State sector to comply with State regulation in order to continue to receive public funding has resulted in ongoing negotiation about the extent to which faith schools can define their own curricula, pedagogical methods and employment practices (Walford, 2001; 2008). Our research indicates that children attending separate faith schools often have less awareness of religious diversity than those attending non-denominational schools. However, this varies according to the model of religious/moral education provision and the practices of the school itself. In most faith schools in the case-study countries,

our research shows that religious/moral education mainly related to, and reflected the beliefs and values of, that particular faith. However, our research also highlights some exceptions to this pattern. In Germany, for example, while in many State schools the requirement to choose between Catholic and Protestant RME lessons contributed to feelings of difference among children, one particular (Catholic) faith school was found to actively promote inclusion and the celebration of diversity. In the other countries, differences were similarly found across schools in their treatment of religious diversity, indicating the importance of policy and practice at the individual school level.

## **6.8 Conclusion**

In the context of globalisation, all European countries are multicultural entities, made up of increasingly diverse populations. Religion is an important dimension of this growing diversity, as populations are increasingly made up of people of different religions and none. Furthermore, the position of individuals in relation to religious identity is increasingly complex, with many people believing without belonging and vice versa.

The treatment of religion in education has become a touchstone against which a country's success in managing cultural diversity may be assessed. Our research points to a number of important issues for policy development at the macro (State or federal) and meso (school) levels.

- Systems of school ownership and governance across the study countries reflect the historical accommodations and compromises made by Church(es) and State. It is clear that a specific school governance system cannot be directly 'transferred' into a very different cultural and societal context. However, our research points to a growing mismatch between a static system of school governance and changes in attitudes and interests as well as the composition of the population in most of the study countries.
- Our research does not point to 'one best way' of resolving these tensions. Systems have variously responded by allowing for the establishment of separate faith schools, by providing different strands of religious/moral education for groups of students within the same school, and/or by adopting a 'teaching about all/most world religions' approach, keeping faith formation outside the formal school system. Our research indicates that each of these approaches raises particular challenges in recognising religious diversity and especially in addressing the needs of minority religious and secular groups.
- Our findings indicate the importance not only of formal school structures but equally of the way in which issues related to the dominant religious and moral ethos can permeate all aspects of school life. Within countries, we found considerable variation in how schools treat religiously diverse groups within the student population. In multicultural societies, it is vital that schools are encouraged to ensure that parents and students of all religions and none feel that their beliefs are treated with respect. While this is challenging for schools and teachers to put into practice, teacher education would appear to have a crucial role to play in this respect. Specifically, it is vital that teacher education incorporates knowledge and awareness of religious diversity, and fully prepares teachers for practising inclusive education. Other measures to support schools could include the availability of relevant resources and curriculum materials to foster learning about diversity as well as the recognition of the

need for schools to plan for inclusion across a range of dimensions (including religion/belief).

- Our research indicates that children are active agents in their own religious formation across all of the European contexts examined. It is important therefore that schools attempt to balance parents' and children's rights to choice and autonomy, respecting the wishes of parents while at the same time allowing children to have a say in issues which affect them.

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## Appendix 1: List of deliverables

No.	Deliverable name	Work Package No.
1	Kick-off meeting; detailed work plan for the project	2
2	Country notes on national systems	3
3	Review of literature on religious socialisation	3
4	Draft document on conceptual framework	4
5	Intermediate report	1
6	Document on typology of European school systems	5
7	Meeting 2; detailed work plan for fieldwork phase	6
8	Progress report	1
9	Qualitative data from five countries	7
10	Meeting 3; work plan for data coding and analysis	8
11	Intermediate report	1
12	Meeting 4; detailed work plan and division of labour on final report	7
13	Production of a draft report	10
14	Meeting 5; work plan for report revisions	11
15	Final report	13
16	Website; National dissemination seminars	14