Unprecedented EU poll finds 90% of European Jews feel anti-Semitism increasing

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Nearly 90 percent of European Jews feel that anti-Semitism has increased in their home countries over the past five years, and almost 30% say they have been harassed at least once in the past year, reveals a major European Union [report](http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2018/2nd-survey-discrimination-hate-crime-against-jews) published on Monday.

The poll was carried out in 12 European Union member states, and was the largest ever of its kind worldwide.

Of the more than 16,000 Jews who participated in the online survey, 85% rated anti-Semitism the biggest social or political problem in the country where they live. Thirty-eight percent said they had considered emigrating because they did not feel safe as Jews.

Britain, Germany, and Sweden saw the sharpest increases in those saying anti-Semitism is a “very big” or “fairly big” problem. The highest level recorded was in France at 95%. Denmark saw the lowest level at 56%, while Jews in Hungary suggested that anti-Semitism was becoming less of a problem.

The UK results, experts suggest, may point to a “Corbyn factor” connected to the ongoing [row](https://www.timesofisrael.com/poll-38-of-british-voters-brand-jeremy-corbyn-an-anti-semite/) over anti-Semitism in the British Labour party.

“Decades after the Holocaust, shocking and mounting levels of anti-Semitism continue to plague the EU,” said Michael O’Flaherty, director of the EU’s Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), which published the research. “In many ways,” he suggested, anti-Semitism had become “disturbingly normalized.”

The research is a follow-up to a 2012 survey conducted by the FRA. The 12 EU countries surveyed — Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom — are home to 96% of the EU’s estimated Jewish population. The online survey was conducted from May to June this year.

The report was released after a major poll for CNN last month [found](https://www.timesofisrael.com/cnn-poll-over-20-of-europeans-say-jews-have-too-much-influence-worldwide/) that one-fifth of Europeans believe Jewish people have too much influence in finance and politics, and a third said they knew nothing at all or “just a little” about the Holocaust.

Nearly half of those participating in the FRA survey said they were worried about becoming the victim of an anti-Semitic verbal insult or being harassed in the next year, while over one-third suggested they avoided visiting Jewish sites and events because they do not feel safe. Forty percent fear being physically attacked in the next 12 months and 3% report they actually have been over the past five years.

*Over one-third suggested they avoided visiting Jewish sites and events because they do not feel safe*

While the 28% of Jews who said they had been subject to harassment at least once in the past year (a figure which rose to nearly 40% in the five years before the survey), almost 80% said they do not report serious incidents to the police — often because they feel nothing will change. Seventy percent believe national governments’ efforts to combat anti-Semitism are ineffective, although more than half positively assessed their work to ensure the security needs of Jewish communities.

“The survey findings suggest that people face so much anti-Semitic abuse that some of the incidents they experience appear trivial to them,” argues the report.

Around 90% of those surveyed said anti-Semitism was most problematic online and on social media. Seven in 10 cited public spaces, the media and politics as common sources of anti-Semitism.

The most common anti-Semitic statements Jews come across regularly, according to the survey, are comparisons between Israelis and the Nazis with regard to the Palestinians. Suggestions that Jews have too much power and “exploit Holocaust victimhood for their own purposes” also ranked highly. Such abuse was most commonly experienced online, in the media and at political events.

The survey indicates that those who had experienced harassment — which included offensive or threatening text messages, phone calls, comments, gestures or online messages — and were able to identify the perpetrator were more likely to suggest the culprit was “someone with an extremist Muslim view” (30%) than someone with left-wing political views (21%) or right-wing politics (13%).

### UK’s ‘Corbyn factor’

The survey also exposes large variations between European countries in terms of the experience of anti-Semitism.

The highest level of concern about anti-Semitism in political life was expressed by British Jews — at 84% — with around three-quarters of those surveyed in Poland and Hungary also indicating it was a problem. Together with Germany and Sweden, the UK also saw the highest increase in the number of Jews who had considered emigrating in the past five years due to safety concerns.

Dr. Jonathan Boyd, executive director of the London-based Institute for Jewish Policy Research, said it was “highly probable that a Corbyn factor can be found in the UK results.”

“Simply looking at the proportions of Jews in the UK who highlight ‘anti-Semitism in political life’ as a problem indicates this,” he suggested.

“Given everything that has happened recently around Corbyn, and given other research data on the political preferences of British Jews which show a dramatic drop in support for the Labour party, there can be little doubt that there is a Corbyn factor here.”

### Perception of rising anti-Semitism part of wider trends

Concern about the level of anti-Semitism on the internet and social media was expressed by more than 70% in every country. It was especially high, however, in Belgium, France, Italy and Poland, where more than nine in 10 respondents indicated it was problematic.

Expressions of hostility to Jews in the street and other public spaces is considered a “very big” or “fairly big” problem by more than 70% of respondents in France, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands, but less than half of Jews expressed concern in Poland, Hungary and Denmark.

Fear of becoming a victim of a verbal insults or harassment in the next 12 months also varied widely, ranging from around 60% in France and Germany to less half that level in Italy, the UK, Denmark and Hungary. Fifty-eight percent of French Jews and nearly half of Jews in Germany worry they may be physically attacked in the next year.

Overall, roughly equal numbers of Jews said that they wear, carry or display items in public — such as a kippa or Star of David — that could identify them as Jewish, as said that they do not. However, there were again large variations between individual European countries, with around 60% in Poland, Spain, the UK, Hungary and the Netherlands saying that they do wear such identifying items at least sometimes. In France, Denmark and Belgium more than 50% said that they never did.

The drop in the number of Hungarian Jews saying anti-Semitism is a problem comes despite the controversy surrounding the country’s right-wing government, which has been [accused](https://www.timesofisrael.com/british-conservatives-under-fire-for-defense-of-anti-semitic-orban-government/) of “whipping up prejudice” and deploying “vivid anti-Semitism” in this year’s general election campaign.

The result may reflect differences in the survey sampling between 2012 and 2018. It may also indicate that foreign perceptions of Viktor Orbán’s government are different from the perspectives of Hungarian Jews. The far-right Jobbik party is also less powerful and less vocally anti-Semitic than it was five years ago.

The survey also tested perceptions of the influence of events in the Middle East on anti-Semitic incidents. Over 85% of Jews surveyed in Belgium and France and at least 70% in Spain, Germany and Denmark said that the Arab-Israeli conflict had a notable impact on how safe they felt as Jews. That figure dropped to around one in five in Poland and Hungary.

In Belgium, France, Germany and Spain more than half of respondents said they felt that people in their country frequently or always blamed them for the actions of the Israeli government.

In Hungary and Poland the equivalent percentages were 8% and 19% respectively. Eighty-two percent of European Jews classed calls by non-Jews to boycott Israel or Israelis as anti-Semitic.

The survey did, however, suggest that instances of discrimination against Jews in employment, education, health or housing are quite rare, especially in comparison with a generation ago. Overall, 11% of Jews said they felt they had suffered discrimination in the past year in the workplace and when accessing public services.

O’Flaherty called on EU states to “take note and step up their efforts to prevent and combat anti-Semitism.” “Jewish people have a right to live freely, without hate and without fear for their safety,” he argued.

The EU human rights body urged a strengthening of Holocaust education and “awareness raising activities,” action to keep Jewish communities and sites safe, and regular monitoring of hate crime towards Jews.

Boyd said it was also important to consider wider trends. “The results of this survey are shocking in many respects, but temperatures are rising about many social, political and economic issues everywhere, not just in Europe, so we are still left with questions about whether what Jews are experiencing is part of a wider social change or malaise that is causing general instability, or whether there is something unique about the Jewish experience that needs to be understood independently of everything else,” he argued.

Seventy-six percent of those surveyed, for instance, expressed concern about rising levels of racism, with rates especially high in Sweden, Italy, Hungary, Poland, Austria and the Netherlands. Seventy-two percent said intolerance towards Muslims was increasing, with 76% of Jews in Hungary and 74% in Poland suggesting it had “increased a lot” over the past five years.

Boyd also cautioned that the survey measured Jews’ “perceptions of anti-Semitism.”

“We can clearly see that they feel anxious — and indeed, more anxious than they did five years ago in most instances — and whilst these are valuable indicators, genuine threat levels are much more objectively and accurately measured by security services than these types of surveys,” he noted.