

# Antisemitism in Europe

IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY



UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

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Cover Photo: The Star of David seen on an iron door in Kazimierz, a historic Jewish quarter of Krakow, Poland on Wednesday, April 8, 2020. (Photo by Artur Widak/NurPhoto via Getty Images)

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

# POLAND

Jewish population: 5,000



## ANTISEMITISM ASSESSMENT

### Top concerns of Jewish community leaders

With regard to antisemitism, Jewish leaders expressed concern about antisemitic rhetoric in public, including by far-right political and media figures. Recent debates over Holocaust history and restitution touched sensitive political issues and unleashed unprecedented antisemitic commentary. In February 2018, the Jewish community issued an open letter<sup>55</sup> about antisemitism, and the same issues persist at present:

We, representatives of Polish Jewish organizations, express our outrage over the growing wave of intolerance, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism in Poland. Increasingly, hate speech has escaped the confines of the Internet to infiltrate the public sphere. It has found its way into newspapers and television broadcasts, including those belonging to public media outlets.

We are no longer surprised when members of local councils, parliament, and other state officials contribute anti-Semitic speech to public discourse. The number of threats and insults directed toward Poland's Jewish community is rising. While we appreciate verbal condemnations of anti-Semitism on the part of President Andrzej Duda, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, and Law and Justice party leader Jarosław Kaczyński, these politicians' words ring empty and do nothing to stop the spread of evil without strong supporting actions.

On the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of the anti-Semitic events of March 1968 and 75 years after the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Polish Jews do not feel safe in Poland. In significant ways, present threats to Poland's Jewish community are different from those we experienced in the past. Unlike many of Europe's Jews today, we do not now face direct physical threats. Despite a lack of physical violence, however, our situation is far from normal.

It is unacceptable for Poland's leaders to merely state that anti-Semitism is wrong without recognizing publicly that it is a dangerous, growing problem in our country today.

We receive authorities' inaction as tacit consent for hatred directed toward the Jewish community and call upon Polish leadership to punish those whose actions threaten our wellbeing.

### FRA report major findings<sup>56</sup>

Among Polish Jews, 85% said antisemitism is a "fairly big" or "very big" problem.

Specifically, 32% of Polish Jews said they had experienced antisemitic harassment over the prior 12 months, and 21% had offensive or threatening statements directed at them in person.

The most common antisemitic statements heard by Polish Jews were:

- Jews have too much power in Poland (70%).
- Jews exploit Holocaust victimhood for their own purposes (67%).
- Israelis behave "like Nazis" towards the Palestinians (63%).

Further, 32% witnessed other Jews being verbally insulted or harassed and/or physically attacked in the prior 12 months.

Only 19% reported to either the police or a Jewish organization the most serious incident of antisemitic harassment in the past five years.

Half of those surveyed (50%), worried that their family members or friends would be verbally insulted or harassed in the next 12 months because they are Jewish, and 35% worried about physical attacks.

Although 25% frequently avoided wearing, carrying, or displaying in public things that could identify a person as Jewish, another 5% always did.

Just 21% said the Arab-Israeli conflict impacts how safe they feel as a Jewish person in Poland.

Among Polish Jews, 42% had considered emigrating over the prior five years because of not feeling safe as a Jew.

55 Jewish Community of Warsaw, "Open statement of Polish Jewish organizations to the public opinion," February 2018. (<https://warszawa.jewish.org.pl/2018/02/open-statement-of-polish-jewish-organizations-to-the-public-opinion/>)

56 European Agency for Fundamental Rights, "Experiences and perceptions of antisemitism Second survey on discrimination and hate crime against Jews in the EU," 2018. ([https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2018-experiences-and-perceptions-of-antisemitism-survey\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2018-experiences-and-perceptions-of-antisemitism-survey_en.pdf))

## Incident reports

As reported to the OSCE, “Special co-ordinators at both the central (the National Hate Crime Co-ordinator in the Criminal Bureau of the General Police Headquarters) and local levels (police headquarters in every Voivodeship and the Metropolitan Police Headquarters) are responsible for preventing and investigating hate crimes, as well as for compiling data from their district and reporting them monthly to the National Police Information System (KSIP). Monthly reports are forwarded to the Ministry of the Interior and Administration.”<sup>57</sup>

The “NEVER AGAIN Association” publishes an annual “Brown Book” detailing hate incidents in Poland, including antisemitic incidents. Its 2019 report<sup>58</sup> noted antisemitic incidents, including no assaults, 1 threat of violence, 24 incidents of vandalism, and 16 incidents of abusive behavior.

## ADL Global 100 major findings<sup>59</sup>

ADL Global 100 surveys included Poland in 2014, 2015, and 2019. Its average Global 100 Index Score was 43%, significantly higher than the 34% average for Eastern Europe and the 24% average for Western Europe. Significant findings from the 2019 survey include:

- 74% agreed “Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust.”
- 64% agreed “Jews are more loyal to Israel than to Poland.”
- 56% agreed “Jews have too much power in the business world.”
- 48% agreed “Jews think they are better than other people.”
- 48% agreed “Jews don’t care what happens to anyone but their own kind.”
- 45% agreed “People hate Jews because of the way Jews behave.”
- 21% agreed “Jews are responsible for most of the world’s wars.”
- 1% agreed that the Holocaust was a myth, and 21% thought the Holocaust had been greatly exaggerated by history.

## Eurobarometer

The December 2018 Eurobarometer survey<sup>60</sup> asked questions about antisemitism of the general public. Among those surveyed, 41% of Polish respondents said antisemitism was a “very” or “fairly” important problem in Poland, about half the rate of the 85% of Polish Jews in the FRA survey who said antisemitism was a problem. Other significant findings include:

- Just 18% believe antisemitism had increased over the past five years.
- 41% believe “expressions of hostility and threats towards Jewish people in the street or other public places” is a problem.
- 33% believe “people denying the genocide of the Jewish people, the Holocaust” is a problem.
- 31% believe “antisemitism in schools and universities” is a problem.

## RESPONSE TO ANTISEMITISM

### Physical security:

Jewish leaders were asked whether security measures at Jewish institutions were adequate to their threat assessments. All interviewees were satisfied with physical security measures in place. The cost of security is partially subsidized by the government, but the Jewish community still makes a significant financial commitment for security.

### Political actions:

*Do officials systematically and publicly condemn antisemitic incidents?* No.

*Does the government have a comprehensive plan for combating antisemitism, including online antisemitism?* No, but the police have developed an “Action Plan” intended “to counteract the promotion of fascism and other totalitarian regimes as well as crimes of inciting to hatred based on national, ethnic, racial, religious differences, or due to lack of denominations or for any other reason.”

*Do officials adequately confer and coordinate with Jewish community leaders on actions against antisemitism?* No.

57 OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), “Hate Crime Reporting Poland,” 2019. (<https://hatecrime.osce.org/poland>)

58 Never Again Association, “A selection of racist, xenophobic and homophobic events which occurred in Poland in 2019 are monitored by the ‘NEVER AGAIN’ Association and documented in the Brown Book,” January 2019. ([https://www.nigdywiecej.org/docstation/com\\_docstation/172/brown\\_book\\_2019.pdf](https://www.nigdywiecej.org/docstation/com_docstation/172/brown_book_2019.pdf))

59 ADL, “Global 100 Survey Poland,” 2019. (<https://global100.adl.org/country/poland/2019>)

60 European Commission, “Perceptions of Antisemitism,” January 2019. (<https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/85035>)

*Do parliamentary committees review government action against antisemitism?* No, but issues related to antisemitism can be reviewed in parliamentary committees responsible for the issues of internal security and committees responsible for the issues of national and ethnic minorities.

### Education:

*Is there adequate formal education in schools about antisemitism?* Antisemitism is addressed in the context of Holocaust education, but contemporary antisemitism is not always addressed and is at the discretion of the teachers.

*Are there informal education programs, like public awareness campaigns?* Many informal education opportunities are available and partially funded by the government. Among them are programs about antisemitism for teachers and students at the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, and through cooperation with Yad Vashem.

*Do schools have adequate plans and personnel to respond to antisemitic incidents?* With very few Jewish students in public schools, no basis for judgment was available.

*Are public sector employees (e.g., educators, law enforcement, judiciary) trained to understand antisemitism, including the adoption and use of the IHRA definition?* OSCE/ODHIR has conducted training programs for Polish police and prosecutors, though such trainings are not part of the standard curriculum.

### Law enforcement:

*Are adequate systems in place to report antisemitic hate crime, including illegal hate speech?* Yes, but the outsized number of antisemitic crimes in the “unspecified” category raises questions. In 2019, police reported 4 physical assaults, 3 cases of incitement to violence, 2 cases of damage to property, 4 incidents of attacks against places of worship, 2 incidents of threats, and 121 “unspecified” incidents.<sup>61</sup>

*Does law enforcement report publicly on antisemitic hate crime statistics?* Yes

*Are antisemitic crimes adequately prosecuted as hate crimes?* No. Jewish community leaders reported disappointment that the vast number of antisemitic criminal complaints were not prosecuted as antisemitic hate crimes.

61 OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), “Hate Crime Reporting Poland,” 2019. (<https://hatecrime.osce.org/poland>)