

Germany's strategy to combat anti-Semitism

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Violent Anti-Semitic crime has increased in Germany; 88 such cases were recorded last year, compared to 63 in 2021. These were the figures released by the federal interior ministry in late February in response to an enquiry by MPs from Die Linke. The total number of anti-Semitic crimes was 2639 (compared to 3028 in 2021), but this only includes data from completed prosecutions, and is therefore likely to increase significantly. This was the case with the final figures from the third quarter of last year, which were more than double the preliminary figures. This upward trend has been apparent for many years. In comparison, 1374 anti-Semitic crimes were reported back in 2012, 41 of which were violent.

Germany is aware of its anti-Semitism problem (see *'The shades of German anti-Semitism'*). This has been demonstrated by measures such as the 'National Strategy against Anti-Semitism and for Jewish Life' which the German government adopted on 30 November 2022 (see *'National Strategy against Antisemitism and for Jewish Life'*). Under EU guidelines, all member states are obliged to submit national strategies in this area.

The German document sets out five areas where its strategy will be implemented: 1) collecting statistics and conducting research, 2) education as prevention against anti-Semitism, 3) the politics of memory, historical awareness and commemoration, 4) repressive measures against anti-Semitism and ensuring security, and 5) the present and past of the Jewish community in Germany. The government wants to counter anti-Semitism both through the German legal order and international action (see Appendix 1). The document also identifies good practices from ongoing German projects to combat the problem (see Appendix 2).

One of the strategy's main components involves strengthening the role of schools in the historical education of young Germans. According to a recent survey on young people's knowledge of the politics of memory, only 24% of respondents say that the time of National Socialism occupies a particularly important place in history (58% mentioned the whole context of World War II: MEMO-Jugendstudie, February 2023). The document emphasises the need to employ new methods of teaching about the Holocaust, not least because of the dwindling number of direct witnesses to the Holocaust and the challenges associated with the growing ethnic diversity of German society. Another recommendation is to place greater emphasis on education about the Jewish community in Germany since 1945. The document also calls for greater care of Holocaust memorials (which are understood as sites of Holocaust-related events and places to learn about the Holocaust). In addition, it highlights the belief that "historical consciousness is also built by the collective responsibility of successive generations" and that the Holocaust will remain attached to its German roots, which is of particular importance for today's migrant society.

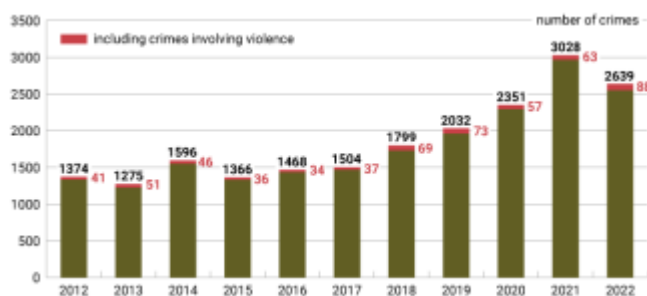
The strategy refers to the working definition of anti-Semitism that was adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). The document foresees an evaluation of the strategy's implementation by the end of 2023, as well as the systematic monitoring of specific areas.

Commentary

- Germany regards the problem of anti-Semitism as a threat to democracy and society as a whole. The adopted document is designed to help combat expressions of hostility towards Jews across all social and professional groups. This perception of anti-Semitism stems both from the country's historical experience and the rise in anti-Semitic crimes seen in Germany over recent years.
- The steady increase in such attacks is tarnishing the image of Germany as a country that effectively combats acts of anti-Semitism. This is particularly important for the German people, given their history and the belief that their reckoning with Nazism has hitherto been exemplary. The German government will push for the EU to embrace solutions similar to those mentioned in the strategy, and to employ some of the tools used in Germany, such as the Federal Government Commissioner for Jewish Life in Germany and the Fight against Antisemitism, and the method of collecting statistical data on anti-Semitic crimes.
- The biggest challenge explicitly mentioned in the strategy is to maintain the existing culture of remembrance among the younger generation of Germans, especially in view of the increasing proportion of people with migrant backgrounds, including those from outside the European cultural circle. The current generation of students is far more distanced from the reckoning with the Nazi past, while the school textbooks they draw on are often incomplete or address the issues of anti-Semitism superficially. This is demonstrated by the results of a survey of 16- to 25-year-olds conducted by the staff of the University of Bielefeld (MEMO-Jugendstudie, published in February 2023), in which the largest proportion of respondents (35%) said that their own family history was not part of the German culture of remembrance (26% said the opposite). Only 49% of respondents knew the exact dates of the National Socialist rule in Germany, while 31% mentioned incorrect or incomplete dates, and 12% said they did not know them at all.
- In addition to defining the goals and tools in the fight against anti-Semitism, the strategy also seeks to project a positive message about the Jewish community in Germany. The German government is striving to illustrate the diversity of Jewish life in a broader context that is not limited to the Holocaust and anti-Semitism. The document emphasises the need to strengthen and highlight the presence of the Jewish community in German society, including through systemic support for Jewish organisations that operate in the country, especially those that work with children and young people. Some 250,000 Jews currently live in Germany, about 100,000 of whom are members of Jewish municipalities. The 23 regional associations that are affiliated with the Central Council of Jews in Germany comprise 108 municipalities. The largest of these are located in Berlin (c. 11,000 members), Munich (8000) and Düsseldorf (7000). The mass migration of Jews from the post-Soviet countries was crucial for the growth of the Jewish diaspora after the reunification of Germany; 232,000 people (out of the 250,000 Jewish people who currently live in Germany) arrived in the country between 1990 and 2017.

- Due to Germany's federal structure, most of the tasks related to the fight against anti-Semitism and the support for the Jewish community are being carried out in the individual federal states. They are home to the vast majority of institutions that perform tasks in this area, including the federal state police (which protects places of worship, schools and some restaurants), counterintelligence structures (*LfV*), educational establishments (including centres that organise workshops under decentralised grant programmes relating to both the prevention of and response to anti-Semitic attacks in schools) and the federal state political education centres (*Landeszentrale für politische Bildung*, under the authority of the state interior ministries). All the federal states have appointed Commissioner for Jewish Life and the Fight against Antisemitism; some of them are also developing regional programmes to support the Jewish community and combat anti-Semitism.

Chart 1. Anti-Semitic crimes committed in the Federal Republic of Germany, 2012–2022



Source: Statista.de, based on data from the Federal Ministry of the Interior.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. The main components of the 'National Strategy against Anti-Semitism and for Jewish Life'.

Domestic measures:

- The strategy builds on previous documents, including the 'Federal Government Strategy to Prevent Extremism and Promote Democracy' and the 'National Plan Against Racism'. An important part of the strategy involves emphasising the importance of the track record of existing institutions, including meetings of the Cabinet Committee for the Fight against Racism and Right-Wing Extremism, which was set up in 2020 and comprises selected ministers led by the chancellor.
- The strategy calls for an effective fight against online anti-Semitism, including through the consistent application of the 2017 law on combating hatred on social media (*Netzwerkdurchsetzungsgesetz*: see '[Germany: Combating disinformation and hate speech on the Internet](#)'). It also mentions efforts to improve students' digital skills as an equally important component in the struggle.
- The document promises to increase the number of help desks for victims of anti-Semitism, and of places where anti-Semitic incidents can be reported; this does not only

apply to the administration, but also to companies, associations and sports organisations. Germany has very positive experience of working with NGOs as places to report offences: the Berlin-based Research and Information Centre on Anti-Semitism (RIAS) is cited as a model example in this regard. Its statistics suggest that there were 470 anti-Semitic crimes in the German capital in 2016, while the interior ministry's data showed only 175 such cases. The discrepancy in the statistics partly stems from the fact that the RIAS compilations include not only crimes but also minor incidents.

- The strategy points to the need to stigmatise acts of anti-Semitism below the criminal threshold. This refers to cases where a particular behaviour or statement is not prosecuted under the criminal code.
- The federal government's plenipotentiary for the fight against anti-Semitism is the most important institutional partner between the federal government on the one hand and other administrative units and the public on the other. The strategy repeatedly emphasises this official's key role in the coordination of activities in this field. Similar tasks are performed by plenipotentiaries appointed by all the federal state governments. The document calls for such officers to be appointed in public institutions, especially those related to law enforcement (the police, the courts).
- The strategy indicates that representatives of the Jewish community should be involved (if possible) in the creation of new structures and tools.
- The document opposes boycotts of Israeli goods, and also rules out support for organisations that call into question Israel's right to exist.
- It promises effective disciplinary measures in cases of confirmed acts of anti-Semitism among officials, and says that legislation will be adapted to this end.

Foreign policy measures:

- The strategy stresses German responsibility for the Holocaust, which "compels action to ensure that a similar catastrophe does not occur in the future".
- The document expands on the previous declarations about the protection of Israel's existence as Germany's *raison d'état* to include the fight against anti-Semitism worldwide.
- It points out that the fight against anti-Semitism is one of the cornerstones of Germany's relations with Israel, which is reflected in the fact that this issue has been on the agenda of the two countries' intergovernmental consultations since 2018.
- The document underlines Germany's intention to vote jointly with Israel in international fora, primarily the UN, on a very broad range of topics, including climate policy.
- The fight against anti-Semitism and cooperation with the Jewish diaspora will form part of the work of German diplomatic missions and political foundations.
- The document stresses the need for cooperation with institutions such as Yad Vashem and the *Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz*, as well as collaboration in youth projects between Germany, Poland and Israel.

- The strategy also stresses Germany's critical assessment of the human rights situation in Israel and some aspects of Israel's policy towards the Palestinians. The government in Berlin has long opposed Israeli settlement on private Palestinian land in the West Bank, seeing it as an obstacle to a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on the principle of two coexisting states.

Appendix 2. Selected projects to combat anti-Semitism in Germany's federal states (highlighted in the strategy)

- In 2021, the so-called hate crime headquarters was established at the office of the federal state attorney general in Brandenburg, which included a contact person for anti-Semitic incidents.
- In Bavaria, the Research and Information Centre on Anti-Semitism (RIAS Bayern) has provided an online procedure for reporting anti-Semitic crimes since 2021. At the request of the victims, the RIAS reports cases of anti-Semitic hate speech directly to the public prosecutor's office in Munich.
- Several federal states, including Baden-Württemberg, Berlin, Brandenburg and Hesse, have introduced mandatory reporting of anti-Semitic incidents that occur in schools. In Brandenburg, the ministry of education keeps statistics on such incidents based on these reports.
- The first 'Thuringia Monitor' was produced in 2000 as a reaction to an attack on a synagogue in Erfurt. A team from the Friedrich Schiller University in Jena conducts an annual survey of public opinion on democracy, right-wing extremism and anti-Semitism on behalf of the federal state government. Researchers in Brandenburg and Saxony-Anhalt pursue similar projects.
- In North Rhine-Westphalia, the plenipotentiary for the fight against anti-Semitism and the ministry of education, together with the University of Bochum, have launched a research project called 'Anti-Semitism as a social phenomenon in schools'. Educational materials for teachers are being developed on the basis of the research findings.
- Brandenburg, Bremen, Hamburg, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Schleswig-Holstein are cooperating with the Yad Vashem International School for Holocaust Studies (ISHS) on the professional training of teachers and organising annual educational trips. Saxony-Anhalt has been cooperating with the ISHS in the field of e-learning.
- The State Pedagogical Institute of the Rhineland-Palatinate has set up offices to coordinate the politics of memory at schools, including those that organise meetings with witnesses to history.
- In some federal states, including Bavaria, Berlin, Baden-Württemberg, Lower Saxony, Saarland and Saxony-Anhalt, the police and prosecutors' offices have introduced guidelines to facilitate the identification and relentless prosecution of anti-Semitic crimes. Coordination between federal state officers who deal with offences based on hostility towards Jews has been strengthened.

- The Moses Mendelssohn Centre (MMZ) at the University of Potsdam disseminates knowledge about the Jewish past and present, and also holds contemporary discussions on the subject. The researchers' knowledge was used to develop a website called '350 years of Jewish life in Brandenburg'.