jpr / European Jewish Demography Unit

Jews in Belgium

A demographic and social portrait of two Jewish populations

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The **Institute for Jewish Policy Research** is a London-based research organisation, consultancy and think-tank. It aims to advance the prospects of Jewish communities in the United Kingdom and across Europe by conducting research and informing policy development in dialogue with those best placed to positively influence Jewish life. Its European Jewish Demography Unit exists to generate demographic data and analysis to support Jewish community planning and development throughout the continent.

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/ Preface and acknowledgements

Belgian Jewish demography and social statistics have been a proverbial 'black hole' of Jewish studies for years. Not much has been known with certainty by social scientists. Population estimates have rested on a good deal of guesswork and little has been known about the social and cultural characteristics of Belgian Jews. This publication is the result of a demographic and sociological study conducted in 2020 and 2021 designed to rectify this situation.

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/ Introduction

The Jewish presence in Europe as a whole dates back to antiquity. It is only natural that the first areas to host significant Jewish communities were Greece and the Italian peninsula and islands, given the geographical proximity of these lands to the Land of Israel. By 1,000 CE Jewish communities were well established in Western Europe. Benjamin of Tudela, the twelfth century Jewish traveller, who crossed the Jewish world for several years and wrote a detailed diary on his way, mentions large, rich and welcoming communities in the heart of Europe, and refers specifically to the area stretching from Verdun in France to Regensburg in Bavaria, known at the time as 'Ashkenaz'.[1] Benjamin never reached these communities in his travels so his notes reflect someone else's experiences and impressions, but the fact stands: they were sufficiently developed at the time to merit his attention. A cursory glance at the map of Europe would suffice to establish that Belgium is a part of, or adjacent to, the area of Ashkenaz, so an early presence of Jews there would be expected. Indeed, there is documentary evidence of a Jewish presence in Belgium since the early thirteenth century, i.e. in excess of 800 years of continuous presence.[2]

A short historical account of the Jewish presence on the territory of today's Belgium can be found in the entry for Belgium in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*.[3] That article also contains a detailed presentation of the contemporary Jewish political situation in Belgium, the structure of the community and the nature and activities of its leadership. These issues will not be covered here. Instead, our aim is to create an up-to-date picture of the present demography of Jews in Belgium and, additionally, an overview of their social and economic conditions, including their Jewish identity. However, generating this picture has been far from simple. Typically, the number and characteristics of people belonging to any group is best gauged by counting them directly, e.g. through population censuses, but unlike Austria, Switzerland, Ireland, the United Kingdom and several other countries, Belgium has never had a census that included a question on religion or ethnicity in a way that Jews could use to identify themselves as such. Whilst alternative methods of estimating population size do exist, they all come with limitations. For example, censuses in France and the USA do not include questions on religion, but special surveys have been run there, often with the sponsorship of Jewish communities, to help generate Jewish population estimates in the absence of a census. Similar initiatives were considered more than once in Belgium, but have never actually occurred.

Still, the structure of the Jewish community has been relatively well known to researchers. They have periodically collected membership data from Belgian Jewish communities and synagogues, and coupled them with some assumptions about the size of the Jewish population outside of the organised Jewish community to generate estimates of the Jewish population size and distribution. During the nineteenth century, the small Jewish population of Belgium amounted to a few thousand people: slightly over 2,000 in 1850, about 5,000 in the 1880s, and passing

1 *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*. 1907. London: Henry Frowde Oxford University Press.
2 See the entry for Belgium in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (authored by Simon R. Schwarzfuchs).
3 *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, second edition. 2007. Editor in Chief: Fred Skolnik. Thomson Gale (Farmington Hills, USA) in association with Keter Publishing House (Jerusalem, Israel).

the 10,000 mark toward the end of the century.[4] Since the end of the nineteenth century, and especially during the first decades of the twentieth century, significant Jewish immigration arrived, especially from Eastern Europe. At the beginning of the First World War, the total could be estimated at close to 50,000.

The community infrastructure grew along a model not unlike that of France, with a division between a *Consistoire central israélite de Belgique*, responsible for religious services, and a *Comité de Coordination des Organisations Juives de Belgique (CCOJB),* responsible for the political representation of Belgian Jews with regard to the public authorities and public opinion. Other main Jewish organisations include *La Centrale-Jewish Central Welfare Organisation-Antwerp*; the *Forum der Joodse Organisaties (FJO)* based in Antwerp; the *Centre communautaire laïc juif (CCLJ)*, based in Brussels, and the *Union des progressistes juifs de Belgique (UPJB)*. The establishment of a Centre for Higher Jewish Studies at the Free University of Brussels (ULB) in 1959 provided a prestigious booster to learning and research. The capital city – eventually the host of the main institutions of the European Union – attracted a Jewish community comprising both traditional and secular elements. The second major city – the large harbour centre of Antwerp – attracted a mostly traditional Jewish immigration and was known for its diamond industry. Other minor Jewish communities grew in Liège and in other areas of the highly urbanised country.

On the eve of the Second World War, Jews in Belgium numbered about 93,000 (including the tiny Jewish community of Luxembourg), largely comprised of first- and second-generation immigrants. By 1945, the number of permanent residents was estimated at about 32,000.[5] From that point onwards the question of the size of the Jewish population of Belgium has become a bit of a demographic detective story. From the second half of the 1940s up to the early 1980s, various experts, local and foreign, provided different Jewish population estimates for the country. From 1982 onwards, up to today, the population size has been estimated and updated by the experts in Jewish demography at the Institute of Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Their work took into consideration rather irregular and infrequent evaluations of the size of the organised community (estimates of communal membership) and they applied conventional methods of demographic estimation to update the estimates of the size of the Belgian Jewish population annually.

However, as time went on, uncertainties mounted. The second half of the twentieth century was marked by important events and developments. Significant waves of Jewish migration into Western Europe followed both the political unrest and decolonisation in North Africa and southern Saharan Africa in the 1950s and 1960s and the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s. Israel matured, and its Jewish population grew. Israelis, drawn to Europe by educational and occupational opportunities, joined existing communities or formed new ones in all European countries. Additionally, the demography of Europe as a whole changed: mortality fell, population ageing progressed, fertility fell and then recovered somewhat. These processes, as well as many others, will have affected Jews in Belgium, raising questions about whether the conventional assumptions about the demographic behaviour of Jews that have long been used to update their population size estimates still hold. Furthermore,

4 Schreiber, J-P. 1996. *L'immigration juive en Belgique du Moyen Age à la Première Guerre Mondiale*. Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles.

5 Bok, W. 1965. Considérations sur les estimations quantitatives de la population juive en Belgique, in Centre national des hautes études juives – Bruxelles, and Institute of Contemporary Jewry of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, *La vie juive dans l'Europe contemporaine*, Bruxelles: Edition de l'Institut de Sociologie de l'Université Libre de Bruxelles, 89–104. DellaPergola, S. 1983. Recent Demographic Trends among Jews in Western Europe, in E. Stock (ed.) *European Jewry; A Handbook*. Ramat Gan: Turtledove Press, 19–62. DellaPergola, S. 1993. Jews in the European community: sociodemographic trends and challenges, *American Jewish Year Book 1993*. Philadelphia-New York: The American Jewish Committee, 25–82. DellaPergola, S. 2011. Jews in Europe: Demographic Trends, Contexts, Outlooks. In J. Schoeps, O. Glöckner with A. Kreienbrink (eds.) *A Road to Nowhere? Jewish Experiences in Unifying Europe*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 3–34.

the question of population size is not the only question of interest. What does the internal structure of the Jewish population in Belgium look like, with respect to education, place of birth, and degree and type of religiosity? This picture has never been mapped systematically.

To rectify this situation, the authors of this report launched a demographic data collection project that spanned a period of eighteen months over the course of 2020–2021. The project mined and consolidated both the known and the unknown, whilst also gathering new sources of demographic and social statistics of Belgian Jews. First, we collected demographic data from the Jewish community in Belgium (e.g. information on deaths and births in the community). Second, we conducted a census of Jewish communities in Brussels and Antwerp, modelled on the synagogue survey regularly held in Great Britain.[6] Third, we explored administrative data outside of the Jewish community (e.g. data on Jewish pupils held by the Belgian educational authorities). Fourth, we explored recent population surveys (e.g. the European Social Survey) that asked a question about respondents' religion. Finally, two surveys about the experiences and perceptions of antisemitism among Jews in the European Union conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) provided samples of 438 respondents in Belgium in 2012, and 785 in 2018.[7] In this report we relate to the latter as the 'FRA 2018 survey' as shorthand. The original purpose of the survey was to investigate the experiences and perceptions of antisemitism among Jews, but it included a set of questions on Jewish identity which provide a detailed view of the religious and cultural aspects of the Jewish life of Belgian Jews.[8] The integrated picture arising from all the different sources shows the size and composition of the Belgian Jewish population with a degree of precision and detail that are, in our view, unprecedented.

Our approach is comparativist. We believe that to understand the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of Jews in Belgium, one needs to examine their situation alongside other population groups and/or the Belgian population as a whole. Where possible, we draw such comparisons. With respect to Jewish identity, we also draw comparisons between Jews in Belgium and Jews in other countries of the Jewish Diaspora. We begin our study by presenting a brief overview of the post-war historical demography of Jews in Belgium, before moving onto an evaluation of contemporary demographic and socioeconomic conditions. The discussion then moves on to focus on the Jewish identity of Belgian Jews. In the concluding section we summarise our results and draw out some possible lessons for policy.

6 See the methodology of the synagogue survey in: Casale Mashiah, D. and Boyd, D. 2017. *Synagogue membership in the United Kingdom in 2016*. London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

7 European Union Fundamental Rights Agency-FRA. 2013. *Discrimination and hate crime against Jews in EU Member States: Experiences and perceptions of antisemitism*. Vienna: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. European Union Fundamental Rights Agency-FRA. 2018. *Experiences and perceptions of antisemitism – Second survey on discrimination and hate crime against Jews in the EU*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. See also: (1) Ben Rafael, E. 2014. *Confronting Allosemitism in Europe. The Case of Belgian Jews*. Leiden-Boston: Brill, and (2) Lev Ari, L. 2022. Contemporary Jewish communities in three European cities: challenges of integration, acculturation and ethnic identity. DeGruyter Oldenburg. The 2018 sample size is sufficient for most analyses at the level of the whole sample and at times also for the analysis of subsamples. A 3% margin of error would apply to a probability sample of this size, at the level of the whole sample.

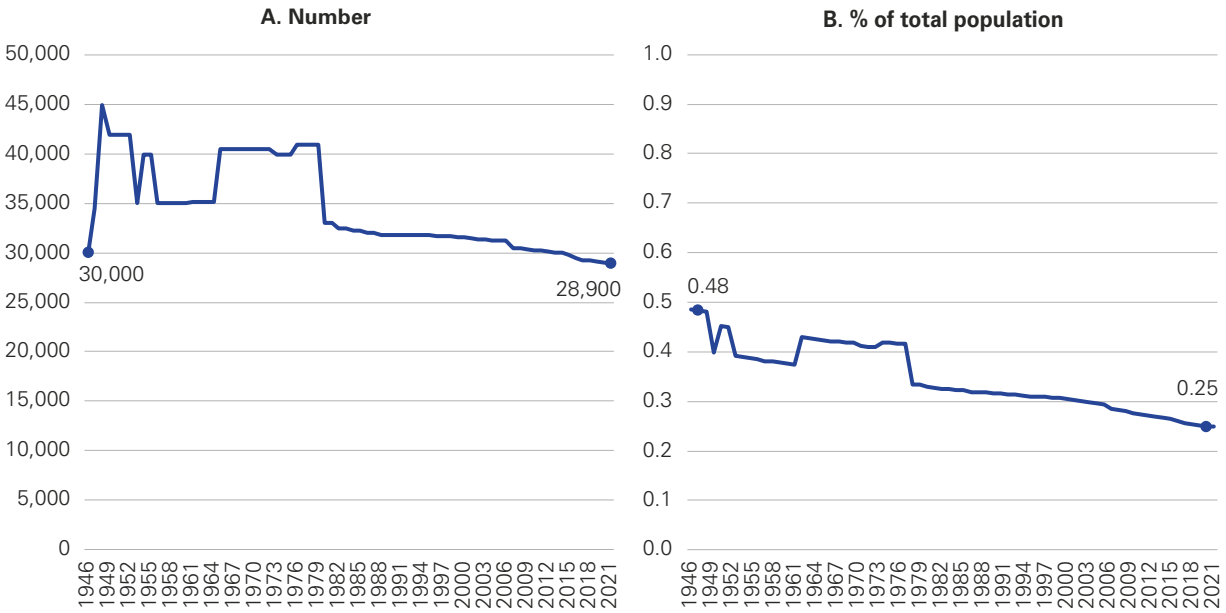
8 In preparing this publication data from the publicly available FRA 2018 are used (GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA7491). The publicly available FRA 2018 dataset does not identify separate geographical locations in Belgium. All location-specific information here and henceforth, in exhibits and in text, is based on the results of an independent exercise of data collection from synagogues, schools and administrative sources pertaining to Jews in Belgium. The exercise was conducted by JPR in 2021. Insights from the exercise, as reported, were then integrated into the work with the publicly available FRA 2018 dataset.

1 / Jews in Belgium: demographic and socioeconomic realities

How many Jews are there in Belgium?

In 1900 the Jewish population of Belgium numbered only about 10,000. The immigration of Jews from Eastern Europe caused its rapid expansion: in the mid-1930s the number of Jews in Belgium was estimated at 60,000.[9] About 30,000 Belgian Jews died in the Holocaust (Shoah).[10] Figure 1 presents a picture of the development of the population size of Jews in Belgium in the second half of the twentieth century, as reported annually by the *American Jewish Year Book*.[11] Fluctuations in numbers seen in the post-Shoah years of the late 1940s reflect the uncertainty surrounding the number of foreign refugees, as well as the number of local people returning from hiding after the end of the Second World War. Later estimates, made on the basis of the membership data of the organised Jewish community, put the Jewish population in the range of 35,000–41,000 in the 1950s–1970s. Fluctuations in this period reflect the existence of competing estimates and the fundamental

Figure 1. Jewish population of Belgium: 1946–2021



Source: The *American Jewish Year Book*, various years; authors' calculations; and United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). *World Population Prospects 2019*, custom data acquired via website.

9 See: Ruppin, A. 1934. *Jews in the modern world*. London: Macmillan, p. 26, p. 60.

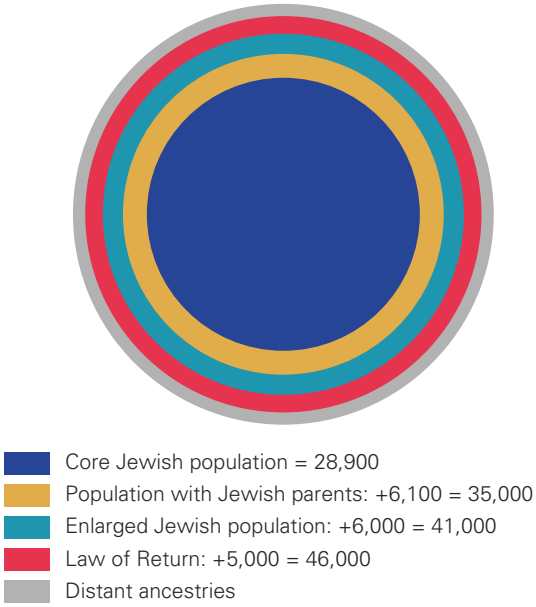
10 Source: Yad Vashem/The World Holocaust Remembrance Centre, Belgium (yadvashem.org).

11 For the most recent estimate see: DellaPergola, S. 2022. World Jewish Population 2021, in A. Dashefsky and I. Sheskin, eds. American Jewish Year Book 2021. Cham: Springer (forthcoming).

uncertainty about the true population size, rather than any genuine changes in it. During the 1980s, Jewish population size estimates dropped below the 35,000 mark, and since then it has declined very gradually to a level of around 29,000. At the end of 2020, the total population of Belgium stood at 11.6 million.[12] Thus, at that time, Jews constituted 0.25% of the total population of Belgium, a proportion below that found in the United Kingdom (0.44%) and France (0.7%).[13] There has been a definite decline in the proportion of Jews in the total population of Belgium: while in the 1950s it stood at about 0.5%, today it is about half of that.

As we write, our confidence in the population counts for Jews in Belgium is at its highest ever due to the unprecedented data-gathering project that we conducted in the country over the two years leading to the publication of this report. Prior to this report, the accuracy rating attached to the estimates for the Jewish population in Belgium in the 'World Jewish Population' chapter of the *American Jewish Year Book* were classed as 'C', in a range running from 'A' (most reliable) to D (least reliable). More specifically, this meant that the base estimates were derived from less recent sources and/or less reliable or partial coverage of the country's Jewish population, and they had been updated on the basis of demographic information illustrative of regional demographic trends.'[14] Such a level of accuracy for Jewish population estimates is only marginally better than an accuracy rating 'D' characterised as 'speculative'. Thus, the enterprise of demographic data collection on Belgian Jews that occurred over 2020 and 2021 represents an attempt to improve this situation. Although there is no conceivable way to improve on historical estimates, the current population size could be reassessed and ascertained.[15]

Figure 2. Estimated Jewish population in Belgium according to alternative definitions, around 2021



Source: DellaPergola, S., World Jewish Population 2019. *American Jewish Year Book* 2019, ed. A. Dashefsky and I. Sheskin. Cham: Springer, 2020.
Illustration: circles not proportional to actual size.

As explained in the Introduction, we rely on several sources for our assessment of the current size of the Belgian Jewish population. Each of these sends a particular signal about the possible population size of Belgian Jews. The number of deaths, births, households, pupils in any educational framework obeys certain demographic patterns and constraints and suggests upper and lower boundaries to population counts. Because of the existence and consistency of such patterns, any observed number of annual deaths, for example, can be interpreted as a signal of a population of a certain size and cannot be significantly higher or lower.

12 Source for total population figure: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). World Population Prospects 2019, custom data acquired via website.

13 DellaPergola, S., Staetsky, L.D. 2020. *Jews in Europe at the turn of the millennium: population trends and estimates*. European Jewish Demography Unit/JPR Report, p.68–69.

14 DellaPergola, S. 2020. World Jewish population, 2019. *American Jewish Year Book* 2019. Springer, pp. 334–335. DellaPergola, S., Staetsky, L.D. 2020. *Jews in Europe at the turn of the millennium: population trends and estimates*. European Jewish Demography Unit/JPR Report, pp. 68–70.

15 On the circumstances of the dearth of quantitative information about the Jews in Belgium see also Rogeau, O., and Royen, M-C., Juifs de Belgique, Une Communauté inquiète est morcelée. www.levif.be, 28 January 2011 Wayback Machine (archive.org).

Combining these various independent signals, we have been able to come up with a single empirically supported estimate of about 29,000 for around 2021.[16] This estimate relates to *the core Jewish population*, i.e. people who would self-identify as Jews if and when asked, e.g. in a survey or a census. Adding people who have Jewish parents but do not self-identify as Jews brings the estimate up to 35,000. If one takes into account all those non-Jews who are related to Jews by familial ties and are entitled to settle in Israel under the Law of Return, the total population of Jews and people with Jewish connections rises to 46,000, which is about 0.4% of the Belgian population.

The Belgian religious landscape of which Jews form a part is rather typical of Western European societies. The largest religious group in Belgium is Christians (about 60% in 2020), with a majority being Roman Catholics. About one third of all Belgians identify as unaffiliated in religious terms, but it should be recalled that their ancestors were mostly Christians. About 7% of the Belgian population is Muslim. The fundamentals of the Belgian religious makeup are not projected to change very significantly over the next thirty years: Christians are expected to remain a majority, though their share will decline to about 53%. The proportion of the religiously unaffiliated is expected to grow to more than a third of the total population; the Muslim population is expected to grow to 12%; increases are expected in the Hindu, Buddhist, Folk and other small minorities, while the current proportion of Jews is expected to remain more or less stable, even though the number of Jews *may* grow as we show later in this report.[17]

Where do Belgian Jews live?

Today, the majority of Jews in Belgium live in Antwerp (about 16,000, or 56% of the total Jewish population), and in and around Brussels (about 11,000, or 39%). Outside of these two areas, the Jewish presence is not very significant in numerical terms, probably in the range of 1,000–2,000, or 5% of all Belgian Jews (Figure 3).[18] Thus, Belgian Jews exhibit a pattern of strong concentration in major metropolitan areas, a situation also observed, to varying degrees, in many other European Jewish populations, such as the United Kingdom, France, Hungary, Italy, Sweden, Austria and Denmark, where Jews are concentrated in capital cities. In other European countries, such as Germany or Spain, the Jewish population is not concentrated in the capital city, but the capital holds the largest community. The fact that the capital city does not host the largest number of Jews in the country is rare in Europe (it can be seen in Switzerland (Bern) and in the Netherlands (The Hague), and it used to be seen in pre-reunification Germany (Bonn) but it usually happens in federal states outside Europe with a de-centralised capital (Washington DC; Ottawa; Canberra; Brasilia).

The pattern of super-concentration in one or several large urban centres, so typical for Jews, contrasts strongly with the pattern prevailing among the general population. While 95% of Jews live in the regions of Brussels and Antwerp, only 20% of the total Belgian population lives there. The contrast between Jews with the general population in terms of their geographical dispersion is also quite common in Europe. While the proportion of Jews in the total population of Belgium is 0.25%, Jews form nearly 1% of the population in the Brussels Capital Region and 1.5% of the population in the Antwerp arrondissement.[19]

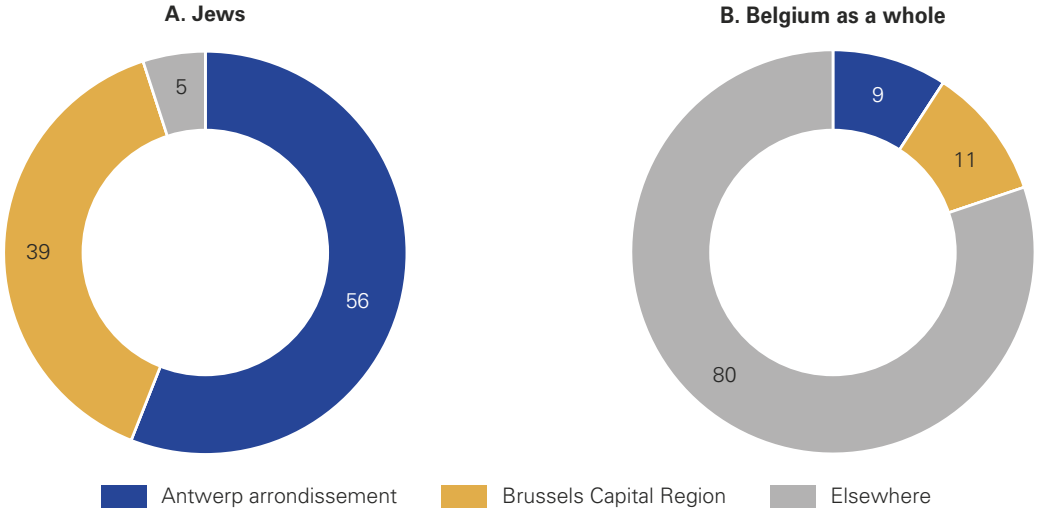
16 Interested readers should consult Appendix 1 and methodological Annex for details on different sources and estimation techniques.

17 The basic religious distribution of Belgium (Christians, Muslims, others) has been obtained from: Pew Research Centre, The Future of world religions: population growth projections, 2010–2050 (Religious Composition by Country, 2010–2050 | Pew Research Center (pewforum.org). The internal distribution of the Christian population has been obtained from European Social Survey 2018.

18 This distribution is an average of estimation Methods 1 and 2 (see methodological Annex).

19 Population figures for Brussels Capital Region and Antwerp arrondissement are from: Eurostat 2021. Population of 1 January by age group, sex and NUTS3 region, DEMO_R_PJANGRP.

Figure 3. Jewish and total population of Belgium by location, around 2020, %



Source: Jews: authors' calculations; Belgium as a whole: Eurostat 2021. Population of 1 January by age group, sex and NUTS3 region, DEMO_R_PJANGRP.

In the beginning of the twentieth century Antwerp was clearly numerically dominant: perhaps as many as 8,000 Jews lived there in 1900 and the total population of Jews in Belgium was only 10,000 at the time. This situation may have persisted up until the end of the 1930s.[20] After the end of the Second World War Brussels rose to numerical dominance. Some scholars have maintained that during the 1970s, the Jewish population of Brussels (then assessed at 18,000) was larger in size than the Jewish population of Antwerp (12,000).[21] More recently, in 1990–2000, it has been commonly assumed, perhaps somewhat speculatively, that the Jewish populations of Brussels and Antwerp were similar in size at about 15,000 each.[22] According to our estimates, however, Antwerp is clearly the bigger community today. As already noted, and as we will explore in more detail shortly, the Jewish populations of Antwerp and Brussels are rather different from each other in terms of religiosity and other social characteristics. A majority of Jews in Antwerp (we estimate above 60%) are strictly Orthodox or *haredi*. In Brussels, the haredi presence is minimal. Some other differences between the two communities – for example, with respect to the levels of secular education – are a consequence of this fundamental difference in their religious lifestyles.

It has also been suggested that in the 1970s, Antwerp and Brussels contained about 75% of all Jews in Belgium, with the remaining 25% living elsewhere in the country.[23] Today, the proportion of Jews living outside of the areas of Antwerp and Brussels is closer to 5% (1,000–2,000 Jews). It was not possible for us to arrive at an estimate in each separate location, but Liège is probably the place with the largest Jewish presence outside Antwerp and Brussels. Places like Charleroi, Arlon-Ostende, Knokke and Ghent are smaller than Liège.

20 See: Gutwirth, J. 1968. Antwerp Jewry today, *The Jewish Journal of Sociology* 10 (1), p. 122, 134, 135.

21 In particular, the entry for Belgium in Encyclopaedia Judaica (authored by Matt Gottschalk and Willy Bok) states that in the 1970s, the Antwerp Jewish community numbered 12,000 while the Brussels community numbered 18,000. A similar figure of (about 11,000 in the late 1960s) for Antwerp is proposed by: Gutwirth, J. 1968. Antwerp Jewry today, *The Jewish Journal of Sociology* 10 (1): 121–137.

22 The entry for Belgium in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (authored by Daniel Dratwa) states that in 2002, the Antwerp Jewish community numbered about 15,000, while the Brussels community was similar in size. See also: DellaPergola, S. 1993. Jews in the European community: sociodemographic trends and challenges, *American Jewish Year Book* 1993.

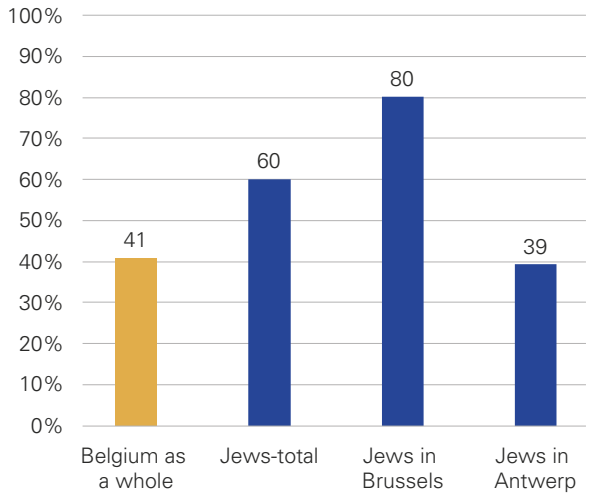
23 The entry for Belgium in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (authored by Matt Gottschalk and Willy Bok) states that in the 1970s, Liège had 1,000 Jews and Charleroi had 500, while Ghent, Ostend, and Arlon had 1,000.

Educational profile

The circumstances of Jews vary across cultures and time, but their concentration in specialised top educational and occupational groups does not tend to vary. Belgian Jews are no exception (Figure 4). The proportion of Belgian Jewish adults with a university education (80%) is twice as high as that found in the general population. This pattern, and scale, of difference, is also observed all over the Jewish Diaspora today.[24]

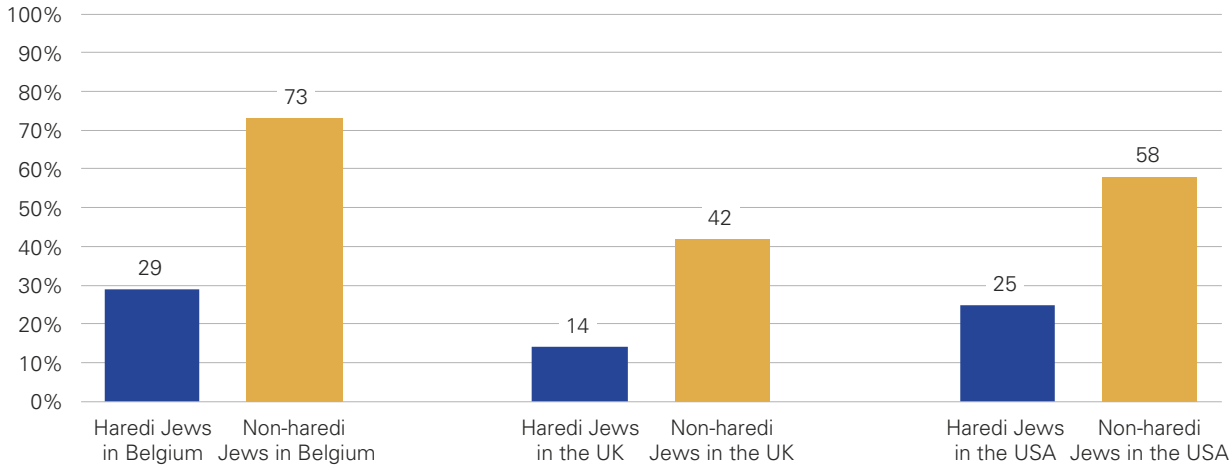
However, there is a significant difference in educational attainment between the Jewish populations of Antwerp and other areas. The population of Antwerp is numerically dominated by strictly Orthodox Jews (haredim) and haredi levels of (secular) education are notably lower than the levels of non-haredi Jews. 29% of haredi Jews have reached university level education (Figure 5), although many more may possess high levels of Jewish religious educational attainment.

Figure 4. Jewish and total population in Belgium with university level of education, around 2020, %



Note: (1) Data for Belgium as a whole relate to age groups 25–64 years. Data for Jews: to ages 25 years and over; (2) University level education is defined using the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) codes 5–8; (3) Brussels in this case includes all Jews in Brussels as well as Jews in all areas other than Antwerp.
Source: (1) data for Jews: 2018 FRA survey; (2) data for Belgium as a whole: OECD (2021), Adult education level (indicator). doi: 10.1787/36bce3fe-en.

Figure 5. Haredi and non-haredi Jews with university level of education in Belgium, United Kingdom and the USA, %



Note: (1) Data for Jews in Belgium relate to university level education (ISCED codes 5–8) at ages 25 years and over; data for Jews in the United Kingdom relate to Level 4 qualifications at ages 16 and over; data for Jews in the USA relate to having a post-graduate degree, BS or BSc at ages 18 and over. Due to differences in definitions of educational levels, timing and age groups covered, comparisons of educational levels across countries should be carefully evaluated; the stress here is on the differences between haredi and non-haredi Jews inside each country.
Source: (1) Jews in Belgium: 2018 FRA survey; (2) Jews in the UK: Office for National Statistics. Census 2011 Table DC5204EW – Highest level of qualification by religion by age; (3) Jews in the USA: Pew Research Center. 2013. *A portrait of Jewish Americans*, pp. 42–43.

24 Comparable data of educational attainment for other Jewish populations can be found in: Jewish World in Data, Jews: Data on education – Daniel Staetsky.

When it comes to secular education, the gap between haredi and non-haredi Jews is as wide as the gap between Jews and non-Jews in the Diaspora. The proportion of adults with university level qualifications among haredim is half to one third of that found among non-haredi Jews.

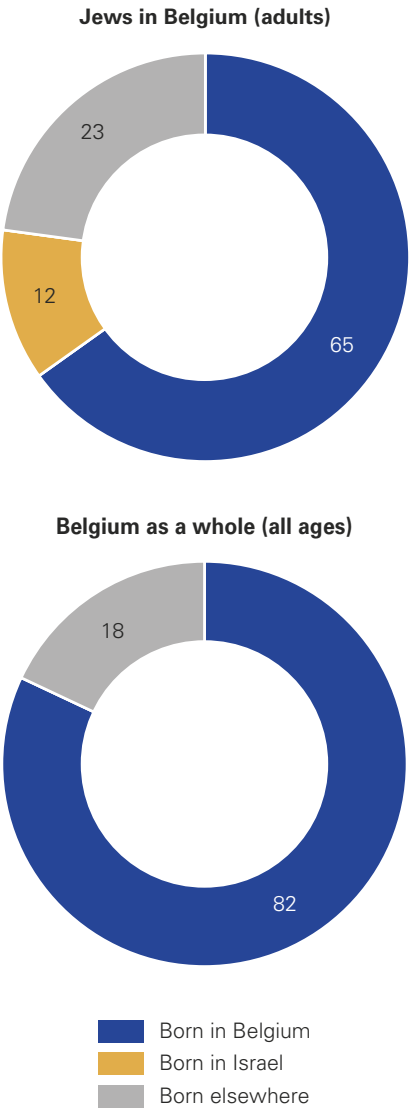
Given the differences in their secular educational attainment, and in the average number of children and household size (presented later in this report), there is little surprise that haredi and non-haredi Jews in Belgium report very different levels of economic security. Whilst 70% of non-haredi Jews say that it is easy for them to make ends meet on their household income, just 42% of haredi Jews say this.[25]

Diversity of origins

A majority of Jews living in Belgium (65%) today were born in Belgium and 35% were foreign-born. One third of foreign-born Jews and 12% of all Jews in Belgium were born in Israel (about 3,500 in absolute numbers). The Jewish populations of Antwerp and Brussels are no different with respect to place of birth (not shown graphically). The proportion of foreign-born among Jews is higher than in the total Belgian population (18%). It was much higher in the past, reflecting the waves of immigration to Belgium of previous generations of Jews. It is possible that the difference between Jews in Belgium and its total population regarding where they were born is somewhat smaller than shown: here, the picture for Jews relates to adults covered by the FRA 2018 survey and excludes children, among whom the proportion of foreign-born is typically lower than among adults, while for the total Belgian population the picture shown relates to all ages.

The fact that 18% of those living in Belgium today are foreign-born is very significant. This picture is rather typical of Western Europe; many countries having double-digit proportions, equalling or exceeding the proportion of foreign-born

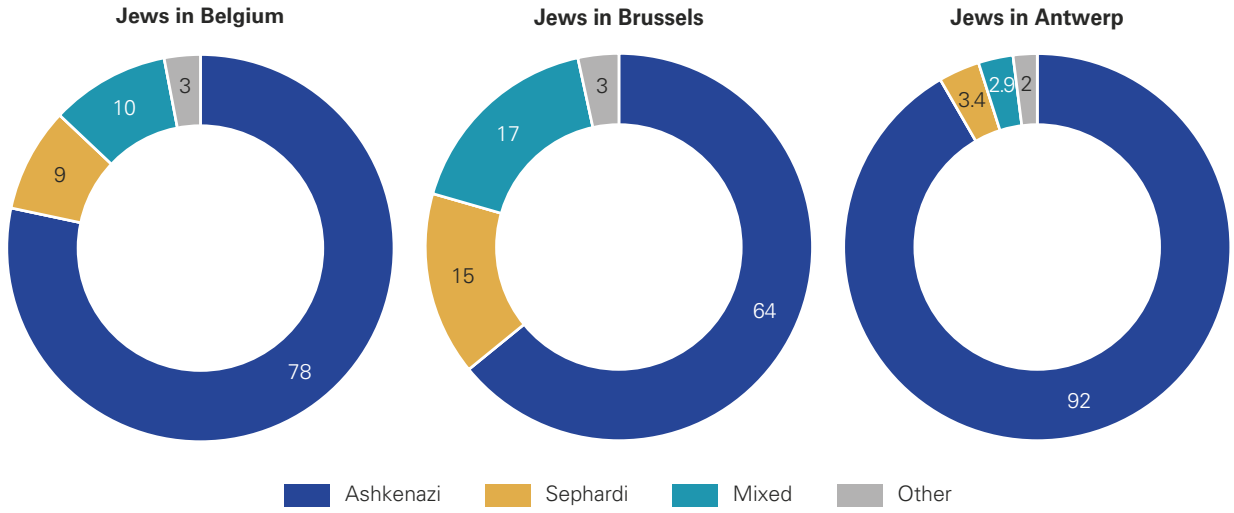
Figure 6. Jews and total population of Belgium around 2020, by country of birth, %



Note: Born in Israel is defined as 'people born in Israel and permanently living in the country'. Data were received from the Belgian statistical authority by special request.
Source: (1) Jews: 2018 FRA survey, Belgian statistical authority, Statbel; (2) total population: % of foreign-born was calculated on the basis of data on the diversity of origin of the Belgian population made public by Statbel at Origin | Statbel (fgov.be).

25 Source: 2018 FRA survey.

Figure 7. Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews in Belgium (adults), around 2020, %



Source: 2018 FRA survey.

in the U.S., for example, a traditional immigration country.[26] Jews in Belgium live in a diverse and diversifying society. We noted this earlier when discussing the religious makeup of Belgium; the diversity of the place of birth is another aspect of this phenomenon.

A majority of Belgian Jews (78%) are Ashkenazi, although the combination of Sephardi, Mixed Ashkenazi-Sephardi (following cross-community marriages), and 'Other' form a significant minority of 22%. The non-Ashkenazi element is especially numerically strong in Brussels, where it accounts for one third of all Jews (Figure 7). Note that the proportion of Mixed Ashkenazi-Sephardi is almost equal in size to the Sephardi population. Mixing between Ashkenazi and non-Ashkenazi is found in Israel, too, and we have abundant evidence of the process of fusion of Ashkenazim and Sephardim in the Diaspora,[27] to which this report adds. It is possible that the proportion of Sephardim and Mixed among Belgian Jews is higher than shown: those stated here relate to Jewish adults covered by the 2018 FRA survey and exclude children. Given that Sephardi fertility is (or was) higher than Ashkenazi fertility and that the process of fusion between groups is more visible among the young, the presence of the Sephardi/Mixed element here is an underestimation.

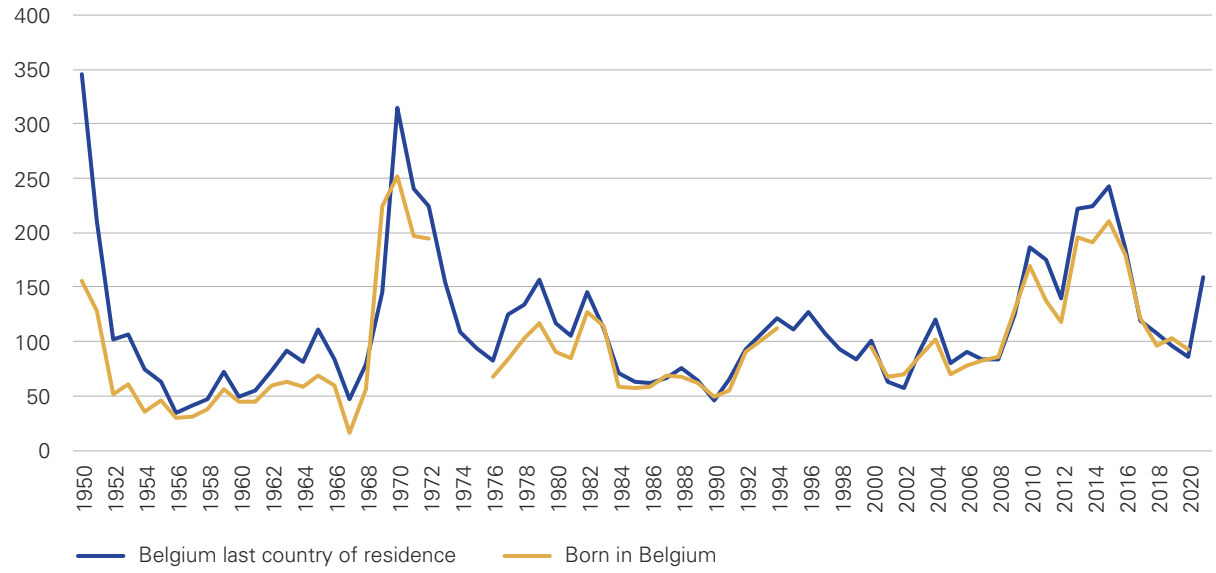
Immigration

Israel is a major focus of migratory attraction for Belgian Jews, yet it is not the only country of interest. About 11% of Belgian Jewish respondents to the FRA 2018 survey indicated that they had made active preparations to emigrate. Among these, a majority of 56% had made active preparations to emigrate to Israel, while others were planning to move to a different country in the European Union (11%) or to another country outside of the EU (33%).

26 Source for the USA data: Jacobs, P. 2018. The foreign-born population by U.S. Region, 1850–2016. U.S. Census Bureau. Slide 1 (census.gov). For other European countries, see Population Census Datasets resource, maintained by the United Nations Statistics Division: https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/products/dyb/dybcensusdata.

27 See, however, the detailed analysis for France in Bensimon, D., and DellaPergola, S. 1984. *La population juive de France: socio-démographie et identité*. Jerusalem: The Institute of Contemporary Jewry, and Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, p. 124–128. For Israel see: Okun, B.S. 2004. Insight into ethnic flux: marriage patterns among Jews of mixed ancestry in Israel. *Demography*, 41, 1, 173–187.

Figure 8. Migration from Belgium to Israel, 1950–2021



Note: immigrant-citizens, i.e. Jews born in Belgium to parents who are Israeli citizens temporarily residing in Belgium, are not included.
Source: Central Bureau of Statistics-Israel.

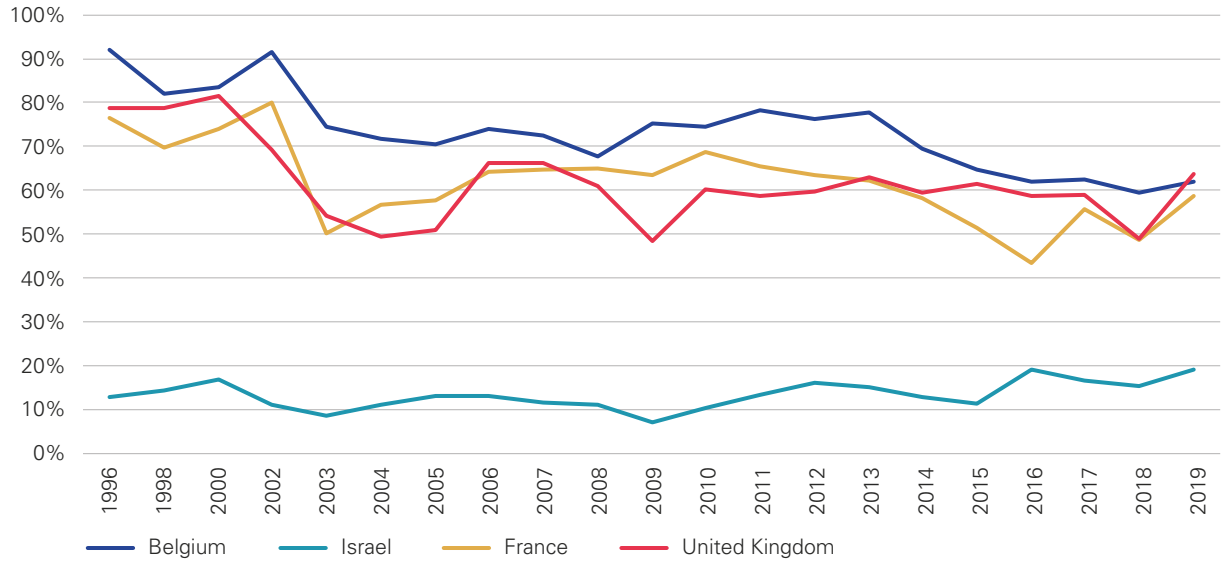
Between 1948 and 2020, a total of 8,055 immigrants arrived in Israel from Belgium, and 6,807 immigrants to Israel indicated Belgium as their country of birth.[28] The volume of immigrants from Belgium to Israel followed the path typical for other Western countries, with a strong peak in the early 1950s shortly after the establishment of the State of Israel, and another prominent peak in the late 1960s–early 1970s in the aftermath of the Six Day War. A third peak was observed in 2013–2015 (Figure 8). In that last wave, Belgium fits into what has been labelled as a 'French pattern' (also observed in Italy) of an unusually high Jewish immigration to Israel in the early twenty-first century, as distinct from a 'British pattern', with its average and steady levels of immigration during the same period.[29] In recent years the annual number of immigrants from Belgium (about 100, or 3.5 per 1,000) is very close to the average level between 1950–2020.

Immigration is driven by push and pull factors. The most frequently discussed push factors concerning immigration of Jews to Israel (*aliya*) are a negative political atmosphere (including, but not limited to, antisemitism) and adverse economic conditions in the countries of origin. It has been shown that Jewish emigration does not reach a level of mass exodus unless there is a severe political and economic crisis, e.g. the rise of the Nazi regime in the 1930s or the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. No such

28 The distinction arises from the fact that not all immigrants from Belgium were born there, and not all Belgian-born immigrants arrive straight from Belgium. The degree of correspondence between the two figures, in the case of Belgium, is very considerable. Note that the number of Jews born in Belgium excludes immigrant-citizens, i.e. Jews born in Belgium to parents who are Israeli citizens residing in Belgium temporarily. The phenomenon of immigrant-citizens is significant in Israel, in part related to movements of the haredi population. Analysts at the Central Bureau of Statistics-Israel clarified that since 1984 till the end of 2020, about 3,000 immigrant-citizens came to settle in Israel from Belgium. Thus, the total number of Jews born in Belgium who made aliya to Israel is likely to exceed 10,000. Sources: (1) official publications of the Central Bureau of Statistics-Israel, and (2) data processing by Marina Sheps, Head of Migration Division, Central Bureau of Statistics-Israel.

29 For further information on patterns, see: Staetsky, L.D. 2017. *Are Jews leaving Europe?* Institute for Jewish Policy Report, JPR.2017. Are_Jews_leaving_Europe.pdf. See also: DellaPergola, S. 2020. *Diaspora vs. Homeland: Development, unemployment and ethnic migration to Israel, 1991–2019*. Jerusalem: The Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Jewish Population Studies 31.

Figure 9. Percentage of countries lower than Belgium, and other selected countries, on political stability/absence of violence



Source: Daniel Kaufmann, Natural Resource Governance Institute (NRGI) and Brookings, Aart Kraay, World Bank, Development Economics, WGI 2020 Interactive > Home (worldbank.org).

major upheavals have been observed in Belgium, or indeed in Western Europe since the end of the Second World War. The extent to which the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which began in February 2022 and is ongoing as we write, is likely to impact on Jewish immigration within Europe is unclear at present.

It is, however, significant to try to put Jewish emigration from Belgium in the context of political and socioeconomic changes occurring in the country. An index of political stability/absence of violence, calculated by a group of researchers associated with the Natural Resource Governance Institute, Brookings and the World Bank has shown that several Western European countries, including Belgium, have experienced a decline in political stability since the late 1990s. Figure 9 compares the status of Belgium with respect to political stability/absence of violence to some other countries (UK, France and Israel): it shows the percentage of countries across the world that rank *lower* than Belgium (and selected examples) on political stability.[30] About 90% of countries were less politically stable than Belgium around 1996, and around 60% were less politically stable around 2019 – quite a transformation. In 1996 Belgium appeared as a safer place than France and the UK, yet that advantage had eroded considerably by 2019. A similar drift from being more to less secure, is observed in France and the UK, whilst some improvement, albeit from a much lower base, is observed in Israel. Still, we found only a weak relationship between the volume of aliya from Belgium to Israel and the level of political stability in Belgium, at least over the course of the last quarter of a century.

A different picture emerges when comparing the annual data on aliya to Israel with the levels of unemployment in Belgium and Israel, and the difference between the two. It can be argued that unemployment represents a significant indicator of socioeconomic discomfort not only for those directly involved but also for society at large. It is true that Jews in Belgium are different

30 Political stability does not necessarily refer to the system of political parties, which has often made the formation of a stable government difficult in Belgium.

from non-Jews in terms of their socioeconomic stratification, so Jewish unemployment patterns may not be the same as among the population at large. However, a general sense of economic deterioration, or at least uneasiness, may be perceived by all strata in a population, including Jews.

Between 1990 and 2020, unemployment rates in Belgium were contained within a relatively narrow range, with the highest at 9.8% in 1994, and the lowest at 5.4% in 2019. The levels of unemployment observed in neighbouring countries such as France or Germany were substantially higher, reaching a maximum of 12.4% in France in 1996 and 11.3% in Germany in 2005.[31] It can be argued that higher unemployment rates in a country operate as a push factor for international migration. On the other hand, Israel as a potential country of immigration (among other countries) had its own unemployment peaks and troughs, with a high of 11.2% in 1992 and a low of 3.9% in 2019. We found that high unemployment in Belgium is associated with a higher tendency of Jews to make aliya to Israel, although the strength of the relationship is moderate. Low unemployment in Israel, in turn, is linked to a higher propensity for Belgian Jews to make aliya. Finally, we found that the more advantageous the employment situation in Israel relative to the situation in Belgium, the higher the tendency of Belgian Jews to make aliya to Israel. The latter measure suggests a significant influence on the yearly fluctuations in aliya. In statistical terms, unemployment levels explain nearly 50% of the yearly fluctuations in aliya. In the literature on international migration, this is considered a very powerful relationship – stronger than among several other Western European countries.[32]

Strong associations between the level of unemployment and the tendency to make aliya have been documented in several countries with large Jewish populations and large amounts of migration to Israel.[33] These results point to the relevance of searching for socioeconomic determinants behind international migration, including aliya. It should also be noted that additional explanations for any tendency among Jews to make aliya may come from different directions. In the case of Belgium, plausible determinants of migration to Israel – especially among the more religiously motivated sections of the Jewish population – may be related to educational needs, marriage, or other reasons related to social networks, and not necessarily to economic needs.

The role of antisemitism behind the decision to make aliya is notoriously difficult to assess. One should bear in mind the possible negative and cumulative effects of antisemitism, including high-profile terrorist attacks such as the attack at the Jewish Museum of Belgium in 2014, where four people were killed. That said, the most recent atypically high wave of aliya from Belgium was already well under way at the time of the attack and cannot be attributed to it. It is possible that attacks on the Jewish community in neighbouring France (e.g. the attack on the Jewish school in Toulouse in 2012) impacted on Jews in Belgium too but this is no more than supposition at present. Further, Belgium is one of a handful of European countries where the legitimacy of Jewish practices such as *shechita* (the Jewish religious

31 Source: OECD. 2021. Unemployment rate (indicator). doi: 10.1787/52570002-en (Accessed on 17 August 2021).

32 See DellaPergola, *Diaspora vs. Homeland*, cit. Consult Appendix 2 for further details. Since any process of migration requires a certain period of logistical preparations both in the sending and the receiving countries, we experimented with both year-on-year and lagged (i.e. delayed) associations between aliya and unemployment. Namely, we also tested whether the level of unemployment in year T is associated with the levels of in aliya in the next year (T+1). Mostly, there have been no remarkable differences between the lagged (by 1 year) and unlagged associations. The proportion of the variation in the annual rate of aliya to Israel explained by the variation in unemployment in Belgium is in the approximate range of 10%–20%. The proportion of the variation in the annual rate of aliya to Israel explained by the variation in unemployment in Israel is about 20%–30%. The proportion of the variation in the annual rate of aliya to Israel explained by the variation in the difference in unemployment between Belgium and Israel is in the range of 25%–50%. This account represents a summary of all experimentation with lagged and unlagged associations.

33 In countries like Argentina or Russia the amount of variance in the rate of aliya explained by the unemployment in the country of origin may surpass 70%. In countries like Canada or France it is in the range of 25%–30%. See DellaPergola, *Diaspora vs. Homeland*, cit.

Table 1. Migration of Jews from and to Belgium: types of migratory exchanges

Type of migratory exchange	Israeli-born Jews living in Belgium, 2019 (A)	Jews born in Belgium living in Israel at the end of 2020 (B)	Balance (A-B)
With Israel	3,500	7,625	–4,125
Type of migratory exchange	**Foreign-born Jews living in Belgium (except those born in Israel), 2020 (A)**	**Jews born in Belgium living outside of Belgium, but not in Israel, at the end of 2020 (B)**	**Balance (A-B)**
With other countries	6,670	5,911	+759

Note: (1) data on Israeli-born Jews living in Belgium and Jews born in Belgium living in Israel at the end of 2020 were received by special request from the Belgian statistical authority (StatBel) and the Central Bureau of Statistics-Israel, respectively; (2) the figure for foreign-born Jews living in Belgium is an estimate from the 2018 FRA survey; (3) the figure for Jews born in Belgium and living outside of Belgium (but not in Israel) is an estimate made on the assumption that aliya to Israel constitutes 56% of all immigration of Jews from Belgium, calculated as (7,625*100/56)–7,625=5,911.

method of animal slaughter for food) and *brit milah* (the circumcision of Jewish male infants) has been questioned at the highest political levels. While the antisemitic motivations of those opposing such practices are debatable, limiting or banning any of these practices would deliver a blow to the quality of Jewish life irrespective of the exact nature of the motivations behind such moves. The proportions of Belgian Jews thinking that antisemitism in their country is a very big problem (43%) and a significantly worsening problem (60%) are among the highest in all European Jewish communities.[34] The possibility of a ban on brit milah, should it ever happen, is perceived as a 'very big' or a 'fairly big' problem by 90% of Belgian Jews, and the ban on shechita is similarly seen as a problem by about 70% of them.[35] The effect of such developments on Jewish emigration and on aliya in particular, if any, is yet to be determined.

To sum up, does Belgium 'export' more Jews than it imports, or vice versa? The answer to this question is crucial in understanding the overall population dynamic of Jews in Belgium and the numerical future of this population. Table 1 presents a summary.

By the end of 2020, 7,625 Jews born in Belgium lived in Israel. Our estimates show that there are about 3,500 Israel-born Jews residing permanently in Belgium.[36] Thus, from a historical perspective, Israel has received more immigrants from Belgium than it has 'given' to Belgium, which is another way of saying that the migration balance of Belgian Jews vis-à-vis Israel has been decisively negative.[37] This is not the case with respect to the migration of Belgian Jews to other countries. Our calculations suggest that Belgium received close to 7,000 Jews from countries other than Israel, whilst it gave these countries a little below 6,000 – a case of positive net migration balance. Therefore, aliya 'drains' the Jewish population of Belgium; if not for the negative exchange with Israel, the Jewish population of Belgium could have been at least 33,000 by the end of 2020 – and this is a minimal estimate since it only takes into account actual Jewish immigrants from Belgium, and it ignores the post-immigration fertility of these immigrants. The migration of Belgian Jews to countries other than Israel is, by and large, balanced by the counter-migration of Jews to Belgium. It is probable that Belgium's position as the centre of the European Union with the employment in EU organisations and business opportunities that this status offers, makes Belgium attractive for Jewish migrants.

34 European Union Fundamental Rights Agency FRA, cit.
35 The data originate from the 2018 FRA survey.
36 Data received by special request from the Central Bureau of Statistics-Israel and Statbel.
37 This characterisation has been created on the basis of a comparison between migration stocks, as information on migration flows is unavailable.

Fertility and mortality

Natural growth, i.e. the difference between births and deaths occurring in a population, is the main engine of population growth – besides periods of large-scale international migration. When the number of births exceeds the number of deaths, there is a potential for growth. When the number of deaths exceeds the number of births, there is a potential for decline. Equal numbers of births and deaths are expected to result in the stability of the population size. Migration, as noted, impacts on population size, at times quite dramatically. If the number of migrants into a population exceeds the number of exiting migrants, a population may grow, and if the number of exiting migrants is higher than the number of entering migrants, it may decline. The fate of any population is determined by the interaction of its natural growth and migration. In addition, a Jewish population may also be affected by the balance between conversions (and sometimes by other less formal passages) into and out of Judaism.

With respect to fertility, the total fertility rate (TFR) of Jews in Belgium – i.e. the average number of children that are expected to be born to a woman – is estimated to be about 3.6 children per woman around 2020. This is a very high level of fertility that contrasts strongly with the fertility of the Belgian population as a whole (TFR of about 1.6). In fact, this level of TFR was last observed in Belgium over a hundred years ago, around 1905.[38] Interestingly, the fertility of Jews in Belgium is higher than the fertility of Muslims, another high fertility group in Belgium and in Europe in general (Figure 10). The finding of a relatively high Jewish fertility compared to the Muslim fertility in Belgium resembles the situation in Austria, and this is the second observation of this kind in Jewish demography, to our knowledge.[39] What accounts for this reality is the presence of the haredi (strictly Orthodox) Jews in Antwerp. By contrast, Jews in Brussels are like any typical Western European population when it comes to fertility.

The TFR of Jews in Brussels is estimated to be about 1.8 around 2020. This level is similar to the level displayed by the Belgian population as a whole (1.6) and in Brussels (1.7) around that date, perhaps only a little higher. Still, it is below replacement level – lower than the level needed to maintain the population size in the absence of immigration. It is also far below the level of fertility of the Jewish population in Israel which had a TFR of 3.0 in 2020, and below the subgroup of Israeli Jews born in Europe (TFR of 2.5). Our best estimate of the total fertility rate of haredi Jews in Antwerp is around 6 children per woman – resembling the levels observed among haredi Jews in the UK, and probably one child lower than among the same group in Israel.[40] Due to the diversity of the non-haredi segment of the Jewish population of Antwerp and the uncertainty regarding the numerical relationships between different groups within that segment, we cannot offer an estimate of its fertility. The TFR of the non-haredi Jewish population in Antwerp is very likely to be somewhere in the range of 1.8–4.0, depending on which subgroup is examined. The bottom and the top limits of this range reflect fertility levels among the Jewish population of Brussels, on the one hand, and fertility levels of women self-identifying as 'religious but not haredi' in Israel, on the other.[41]

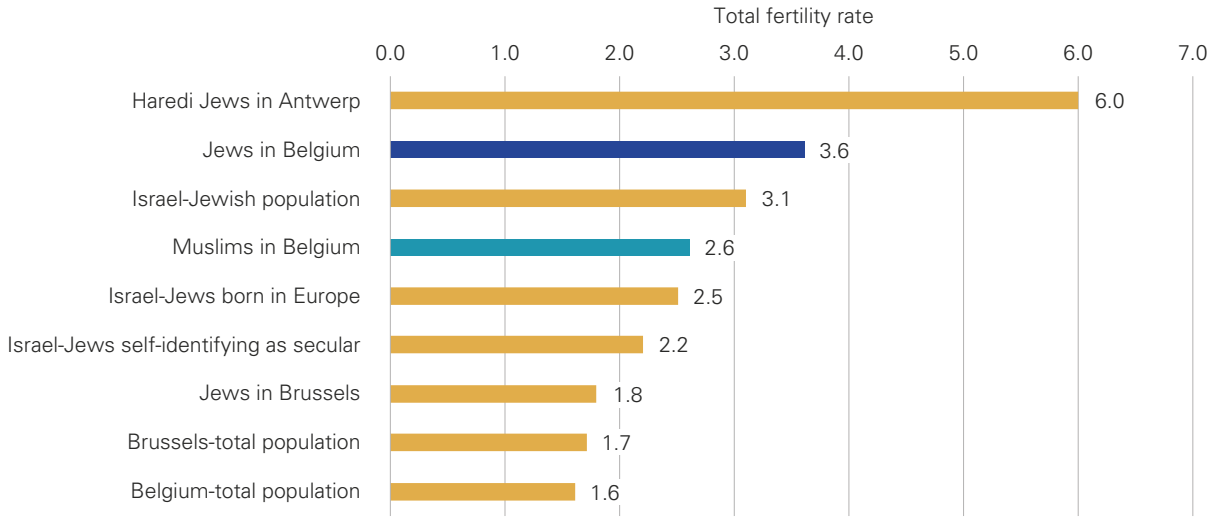
38 Historical fertility statistics for Belgium can be found at: OurWorldInData, Fertility rate over the long-term, 1800 to 2017 (ourworldindata.org).

39 For estimates of TFR of Muslims in Belgium and Europe see: Pew Research Center. 2017. *Europe's growing Muslim population*. For comparison of Jewish and Muslim fertility in a different European context see: Staetsky, L. D. and DellaPergola, S. 2020. *Jews in Austria: a demographic and social portrait*. European Jewish Demography Unit/JPR.

40 Hleihel, A. 2017. *Fertility among Jewish Women in Israel by Level of Religiosity, 1979–2017*. Working paper 101. Jerusalem: Central Bureau of Statistics.

41 See methodological Annex for estimation of Jewish total fertility rate in Belgium, StatBel for total fertility rate of Belgium and Brussels and Central Bureau of Statistics-Israel (Statistical Abstract of Israel 2020/71, Table 2.42) for fertility rates of Israeli Jews. For TFR by degree of religiosity in Israel see also: Hleihel, A. 2017. *Fertility among Jewish women in Israel, by level of religiosity, 1979–2017*. Working Paper 101. Jerusalem: Central Bureau of Statistics.

Figure 10. Total fertility rate of Jews in Belgium and selected comparator populations, around 2020



Note: Data for Jews in Belgium are around the year 2020, for Belgium as a whole, and Brussels, year 2019, for Jews in Israel in the range of 2015–2019, and for Muslims in Belgium in the range of 2015–2020.
Source: See methodological Annex for all sources and methods relating to estimation of fertility of Jews in Belgium. For the total Belgian population and the population of Brussels: StatBel, A still declining birth rate and fertility rate | Statbel (fgov.be). For Muslims in Belgium: Pew Research Center. 2017. Europe's growing Muslim population. For Jews in Israel: (1) Central Bureau of Statistics-Israel (Statistical Abstract of Israel 2020/71, Table 2.42) and (2) Hleihel, A. 2017. Fertility among Jewish women in Israel, by level of religiosity, 1979–2017. Working Paper 101. Jerusalem: Central Bureau of Statistics.

Turning to mortality, the life expectancy of Jews in Belgium is higher than among the total population of Belgium. In this respect, there is no difference between haredi and non-haredi Jews, or Jews in Brussels and Antwerp. Our estimations show that the life expectancy at birth of Jewish males in Belgium is *at least* 81.5 years, and for Jewish females it is 85.0 years. This is above the levels observed in the total population of Belgium, where male life expectancy is 79.1 years and female life expectancy is 83.7 years. Thus, Jewish life expectancy is estimated to be 1.3–2.4 years higher than the life expectancy of the Belgian population as a whole.[42] This observation of relatively high longevity compared to the populations surrounding them has been seen over many years and across different Jewish Diaspora communities, and has been attributed to the relatively high socioeconomic standing of Jews as well as to certain behavioural characteristics rooted in Jewish culture and political history.[43] The finding of relatively high longevity of Jews in Belgium is to be expected in view of the existing evidence elsewhere. The same is true of the similarity between haredi and non-haredi longevity levels. Previous research into the differences in mortality by religiosity among Jews has shown that the longevity levels of haredi and non-haredi Jews are comparable. Our data too indicate that Brussels and Antwerp Jews are similar when it comes to the levels of longevity.[44]

42 The life expectancy of the Belgian population is sourced from StatBel, Life expectancy and life tables | Statbel (fgov.be), and it represents an average figure for the years 2017–2018 for full comparability with Jewish figures. See methodological Annex for details and logic of estimation methods.

43 More details on this subject can be found in: DellaPergola, S. 1989. Changing Patterns of Jewish Demography in the Modern World. *Studia Rosenthaliana, The Netherlands and Jewish Migration; The Problem of Migration and Jewish Identity*, special issue published together with 23, 2, 1989, 154–174. Staetsky, L. Daniel and Hinde, A. 2015. Jewish mortality reconsidered. *Journal of Biosocial Science* 47 (3): 376–401.

44 The life expectancy figures of Israeli haredi are shown in: Central Bureau of Statistics, Israel. 2019. Health and social profile of the localities in Israel 2011–2017. (Hebrew). https://www.cbs.gov.il/en/mediarelease/Pages/2019/Health-Social-Profile-Localities-in-Israel-2011-2017.aspx.

Population growth of Jews in Belgium: present and future

In this final section on the demography of Belgian Jews we consider the numerical prospects of this population.[45] What is likely to happen to this population and community in the medium-term? What is the net outcome of the interplay between births, deaths and the migration of Jews both to and from Belgium? Does it generate, and promise, growth or decline? Based on all the data that have been made available to us we conclude that:

1. At present, the Jewish population of Brussels is experiencing close to zero growth. The number of births in this population is very close to the number of deaths. It is very likely that the numbers of Jews in areas *outside* of Brussels and Antwerp are declining.

2. The Jewish population of Antwerp has a significant excess of births over deaths. This population is the growth engine of the Belgian Jewish population as a whole.

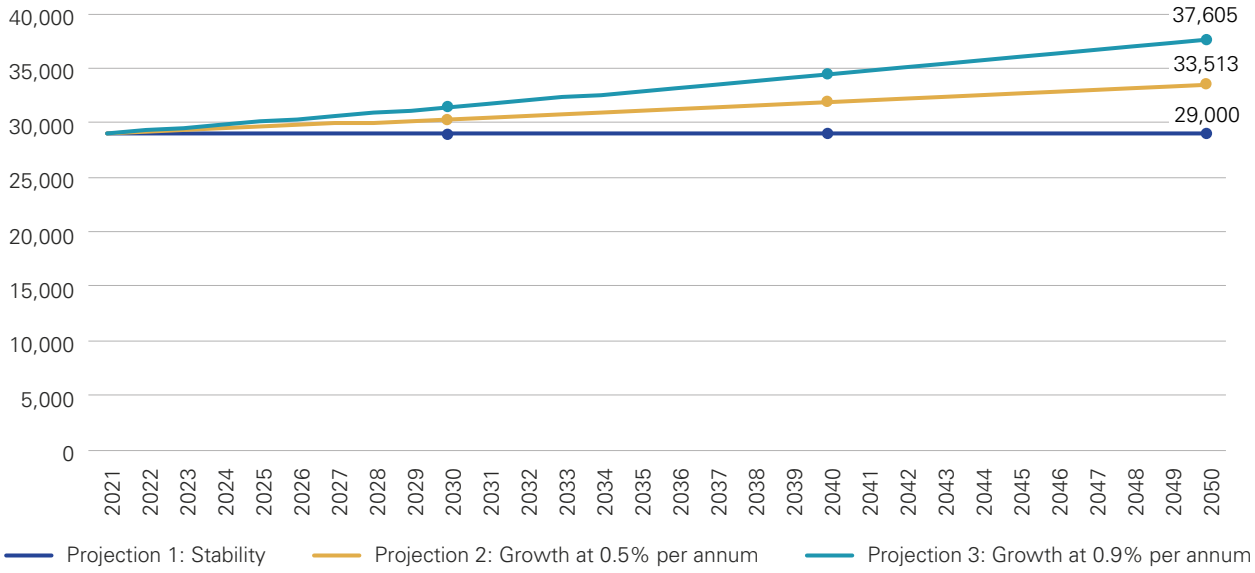
3. The migration balance of Jews in Belgium is very likely to be negative: more Jews leave Belgium than come to it. This outcome is generated, in high probability, by aliya to Israel. The migration of Belgian Jews to and from countries other than Israel is more balanced.

4. Still, around 2020 at least, the Belgian Jewish population displayed a potential for growth: even the negative migration balance cannot neutralise the gains stemming from the highly positive balance of births and deaths in Antwerp.

Below we present three projections for the Jewish population of Belgium (Figure 11):

1. Numerical stability, that could result from intense numerical decline in Brussels and the regions outside Brussels and Antwerp, and a very significant trimming of growth in Antwerp as a result of migration. For this scenario to materialise, both processes need to operate on a more significant scale than is currently observed. We consider this a very conservative scenario.

Figure 11. Jews in Belgium: current population size and projection into the future (number)



Source: Authors' calculations. See methodological Annex for further details.

45 For the methodological considerations and further details underlying the conclusions in this section, the methodological Annex should be consulted.

2. Growth at 0.5% per annum, which would result from combining nearly zero growth in Brussels, growth in Antwerp at the level observed in 2020, and substantial levels of emigration, similar to the ones observed in 2010–2015.

3. Growth at 0.9% per annum, which would result strictly from the realities observed around 2020, as previously described: nearly zero growth in Brussels, growth in Antwerp and moderate levels of migration, as observed in 2016–2019.

If the maximum growth scenario plays out among the Belgian Jewish population, it is expected to be 30% higher than the present level in 2050

It is noteworthy that the rates of growth suggested by our data (0.5% and 0.9%) are much higher than the levels observed in contemporary Belgium and are very similar to the levels observed among the Jewish population of Austria.[46] Both in Belgium and in Austria, the presence of the haredi population, with its high fertility and youthful age structure, is well felt. Both Jewish populations possess a significant potential for growth. If the maximum growth scenario plays out among the Belgian Jewish population, it is expected to be 30% higher than the present level in 2050. Our lowest scenario for Belgian Jews is numerical stability. It remains to be seen, whether in future years, national socioeconomic circumstances and the cultural and political atmosphere will allow that growth potential to come to fruition. The experience from the recent past indicates that, under similar internal and external circumstances, the Jewish population of Belgium did not really grow.

46 See: (1) World Population Prospects 2019, World Population Prospects – Population Division – United Nations, (2) Staetsky, L.D. and DellaPergola, S. 2020. *Jews in Austria: a demographic and social portrait*. European Jewish Demography Unit/Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

2 / Jewish identity

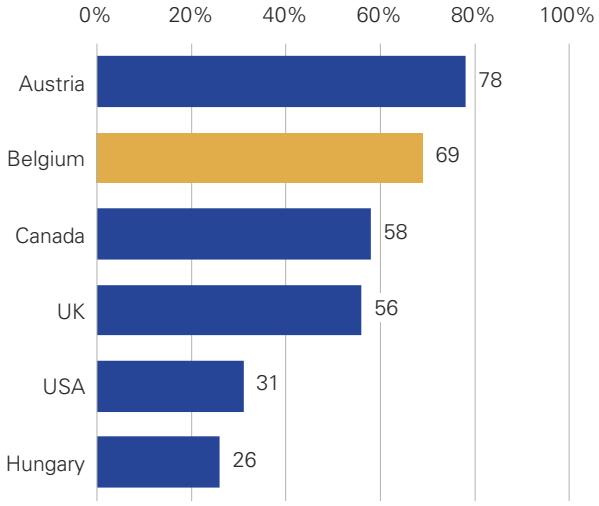
Communal affiliation

We estimate that 69% of adult Jews in Belgium are affiliated to a synagogue. What is meant by 'affiliation' in this context goes beyond regular attendance of synagogue services, and relates to the formal membership of a synagogue as well as attendance; the spectrum of the latter is from zero or near zero to very frequent (e.g. daily) attendance. 'Affiliation' does not relate to the membership of a Jewish club of no religious character. In Figure 12, the level of affiliation in Belgium is compared to the levels of affiliation observed in other selected Jewish populations. The Belgian affiliation level is relatively high. It is somewhat lower than the levels observed in Austria, for example, but much higher than in Canada and the United Kingdom, where the levels of affiliation are considered high. Affiliation levels are much higher in Belgium than in the US and Hungary, both examples of communities with low levels of affiliation.

Affiliation levels are much higher in Belgium than in the US and Hungary, both examples of communities with low levels of affiliation

The comparatively high level of communal affiliation in Belgium is a combined result of the nearly universal affiliation in Antwerp (around 94%) and the much lower but still significant level of affiliation in Brussels (51%). In Brussels, the level of communal affiliation is not very different to that found in the UK.

Figure 12. Household affiliation to a synagogue in Belgium, in comparison to selected Jewish populations, %



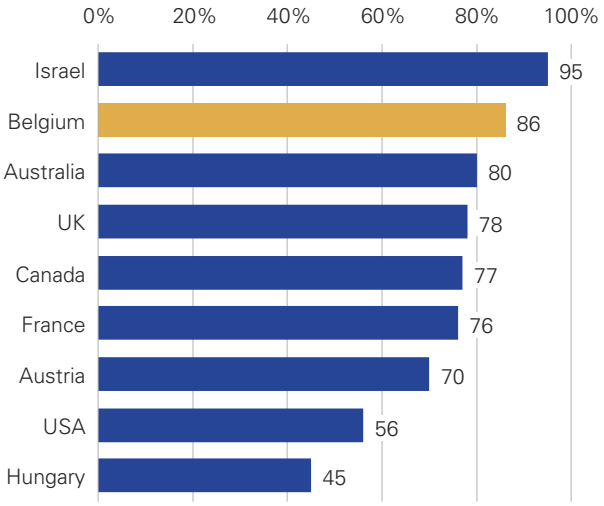
Note: in Belgium the estimates are based on the 2018 FRA survey and authors' estimations of the size and geographical distribution of the Belgian Jewish population; in Canada and the USA the estimates are derived from surveys of adult Jews (based on the question regarding synagogue membership); in the UK the estimates are based on a survey of synagogues (based on the questions regarding the number of member households) and counts of Jewish households derived from the census; in Hungary the estimate is derived from a survey of adult Jews (based on the question on membership in a religious Jewish community), and it is likely to represent the top boundary of affiliation. Sources: (1) Belgium: authors' calculations on the basis of the FRA 2018 survey, administrative records of Jewish community, vital statistics and data on Jewish schools in Belgium (see Appendix 1 and methodological Annex); (2) Austria: Staetsky, L.D. and DellaPergola, S. 2020. *Jews in Austria: a demographic and social portrait*. London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research; (3) Canada: Brym, R., Neuman, J., and Lenton, R. 2019. *2018 survey of Jews in Canada,* p.24; (4) Hungary: Kovács, A. and Barna, I. 2018. *Zsidok es zsidosag magyarorszagon 2017-ben. Egy zsociologiai kutatas eredmenyei.* Budapest: Szombat, p.181; (5) UK: Casale Mashiah, D. and Boyd, J. 2017. *Synagogue membership in the United Kingdom in 2016.* London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research, p.8; (6) US: Pew Research Center. 2013. *A portrait of Jewish Americans*, p.60.

Intermarriage

86% of Belgian Jews who are married or in registered partnerships have a Jewish partner. This is a very high proportion compared to other Diaspora Jewish populations where the scope of intermarriage has been well documented (Figure 13). In Brussels the proportion of partnered Jews married to other Jews (78%) is lower than in Antwerp (98%), as one would expect based on the religious makeup of these communities. In Brussels, 68% of partnered Jews have spouses who are Jewish by birth and 10% have partners who are Jewish by conversion. In Antwerp the figures are 95% and 3%, respectively.

Belgium has one of the lowest rates of intermarriage among European countries. 14% of married Jews in Belgium had a non-Jewish spouse in 2018, compared to 20–30% in the UK, France and Austria, and above 40% in Hungary and Germany.[47] The rate of intermarriage was distinctly lower among the younger than among the older generation. In 2018, among Jews aged 50 and above, 26% of Jewish men and 13% of Jewish women were intermarried. Among those below age 50, the percentages were 11% and 7%, respectively. Three explanations can be provided for these age differentials. One is that the higher rate of growth among the more traditional segments of the Jewish population generates a higher proportion of haredi and orthodox Jews among the younger age cohorts – hence less propensity to intermarry. A second explanation, related to the previous one, is that the more religious segment of the Jewish population tends to marry at a younger age and within the Jewish fold. Those who marry later in life tend to have non-Jewish partners more often. A third explanation is that, as observed in most other European countries as well, the pendulum seems to have reversed from a growing process of integration and assimilation, to a stronger propensity to remain within the fold of the Jewish community among the younger. This may reflect the growing pressure from a hostile environment, as documented by recent research on the perceptions and experiences of antisemitism, among other factors.[48]

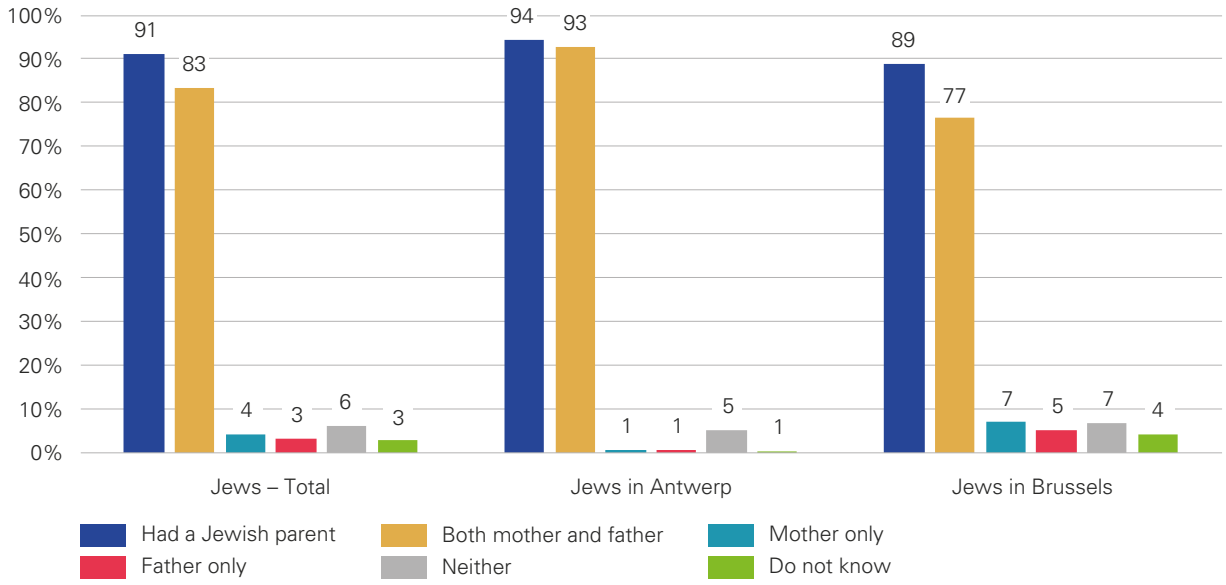
Figure 13. Proportion of persons with Jewish partner/spouse among Jews in Belgium and selected countries, 2018, %



Note: in Belgium and Austria the figures relate to married and those in registered partnerships; in the USA and Israel – to those married and in intact marriages; in Canada – to those married or in common law; in Hungary – to those married or in a partnership; in the UK, France, and Australia – to those married. Cohabitation is excluded from these figures, with the exception of Canada and Hungary.
Sources: (1) Belgium: 2018 FRA survey; (2) Austria: Staetsky, L.D. and DellaPergola, S. 2020. *Jews in Austria: a demographic and social portrait*. European Jewish Demography Unit/Institute for Jewish Policy Research; (3) Israel: DellaPergola, S. 2017. Ethnoreligious Intermarriage in Israel: An Exploration of the 2008 Census. *Journal of Israeli History*, 36, 2, 149–170. See also: Pew Research Center. 2016. *Israel's religiously divided society*, p.60; (4) Australia: Graham, D. 2014. *The Jewish population of Australia: key findings from the 2011 Census*. JCA, p.19; (5) UK: Graham, D. 2016. *Jews in couples: marriage, intermarriage, cohabitation and divorce in Britain*. London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research, p.12; (6) Canada: Brym, R., Neuman, J., and Lenton, R. 2019. *2018 survey of Jews in Canada*, p.39; (7) France: Cohen, E. 2015. *Jews in France today: identity and values*. Leiden: Brill, p.102; (8) USA: Pew Research Center. 2013. *A portrait of Jewish Americans*, p.35; (9) Hungary: Kovács, A. and Barna, I. 2018. *Zsidok es zsidosag magyarorszagon 2017-ben. Egy zsociologiai kutatas eredmenyei*. Budapest: Szombat, p.42.

47 For further information on this topic see DellaPergola and Staetsky, *Jews in Europe at the turn of the Millennium*, cit.
48 European Union Fundamental Rights Agency-FRA. *Experiences and perceptions of antisemitism – Second survey*, cit.

Figure 14. Jews in Belgium: types of Jewish origin, %



Source: authors' calculations on the basis of the FRA 2018 survey, administrative records of the Jewish community, vital statistics and data on Jewish schools in Belgium.

Jewish origin and Jewish parents

Asking about people's family origins and parentage is a way to address the issue of 'retrospective continuity'. This section addresses two questions: (1) to what extent do the Jews of today derive from the Jews of yesterday; and (2) how significant is the presence of newcomers to the Jewish People and religion?

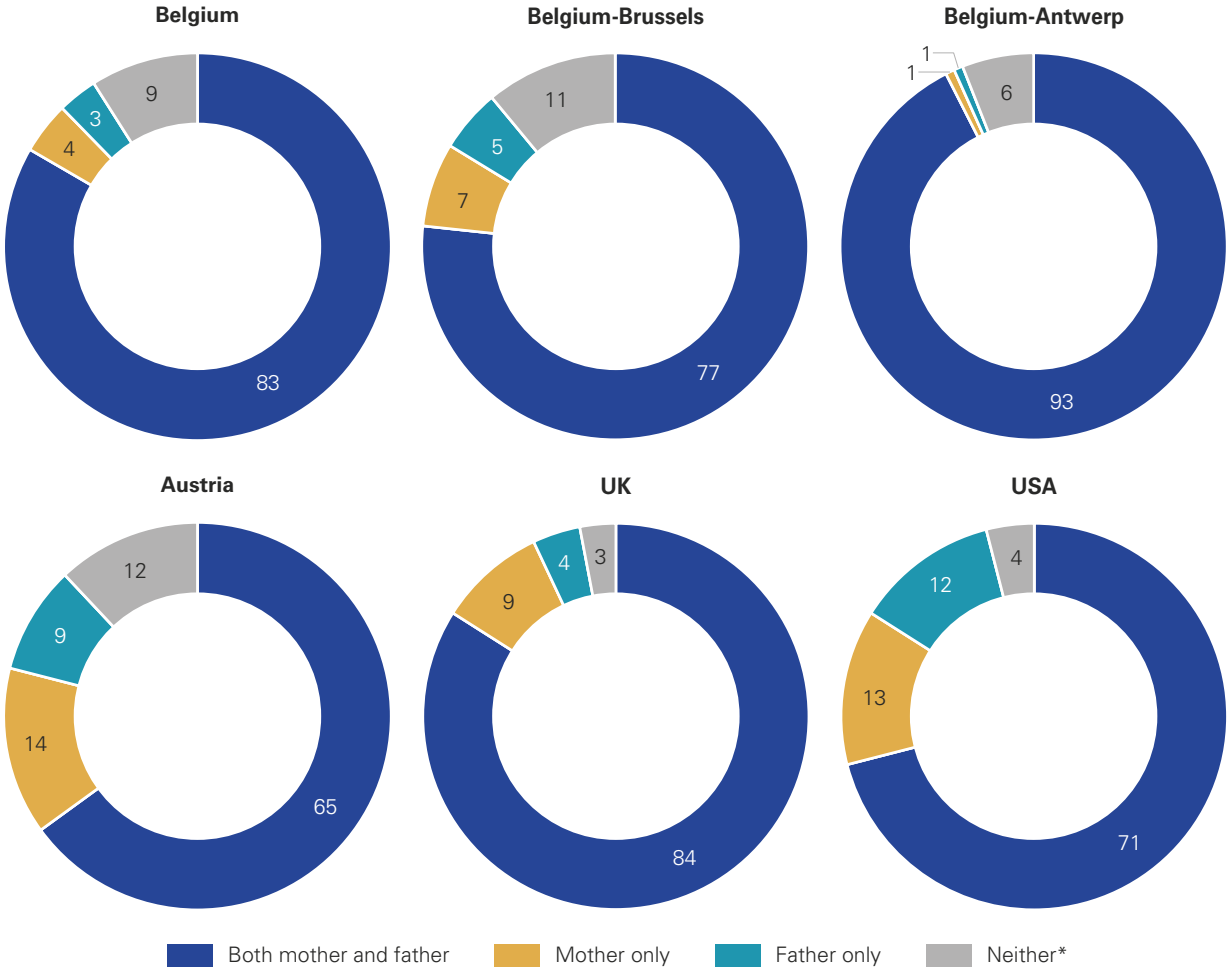
Figure 14 shows that an absolute majority of Jews in Belgium today have at least one Jewish parent (91%), and for 83% both parents are Jewish. The minorities – people without an immediate Jewish background (9%) and of mixed origin (7%) – are nevertheless not negligible, and they are more significant in Brussels (11% and 12%, respectively) than in Antwerp (6% and 2%, respectively).

The presence of converts and people of mixed origin among Jews is well-known, but is rarely, if ever, quantified. Whilst distancing from Jewishness and Judaism, whether through intermarriage or through emotionally and psychologically drifting away, has been relatively well-researched, work on the presence of converts and of some of the people of mixed origin in Jewish communities who continue to consider or call themselves Jews, rarely receives the same attention. Yet Jews with only one or no Jewish parents account for 16% of Jews in Belgium. In some other European countries (e.g. Austria) and the US, their combined proportion approaches one third of all Jews; in other places (the UK, and also Canada, not presented here) the proportion is smaller but still not negligible (Figure 15).

A widely held view is that assimilation, and intermarriage as one of its principal vehicles, are a threat to Jewish existence. There are other views that are less pessimistic and eager to point out that the mixing of Jews with non-Jews can be not only a source of cultural enrichment but also an aid to the demographic growth of Jewish communities.[49] The first need, in any case, is to document the ongoing trends with sound data. We assert, on empirical grounds, that intermarriage can be a path to the loss of Jewish identity for many offspring of the descendants of these marriages. To be precise,

49 These debates have been highlighted in: Staetsky, L.D. and DellaPergola, S. 2019. *Why European Jewish demography? A foundation paper*. European Jewish Demography Unit/Institute for Jewish Policy Research, pp. 7–9.

Figure 15. Jews in Belgium: types of Jewish origin in comparison to selected Jewish populations in the West, %



Note: the category 'Neither' includes a small proportion of people who said 'Don't Know'.
Sources: (1) Belgium: Source: authors' calculations on the basis of the FRA 2018 survey, administrative records of the Jewish community, vital statistics and data on Jewish schools in Belgium; (2) Austria: Staetsky, L.D. and DellaPergola, S. 2020. *Jews in Austria: a demographic and social portrait*. European Jewish Demography Unit/Institute for Jewish Policy Research; (3) UK: authors' calculations on the basis of the FRA 2018 survey; (4) US: Pew Research Center. 2013. *A portrait of Jewish Americans*, p. 65 (includes persons self-reporting as partly Jewish).

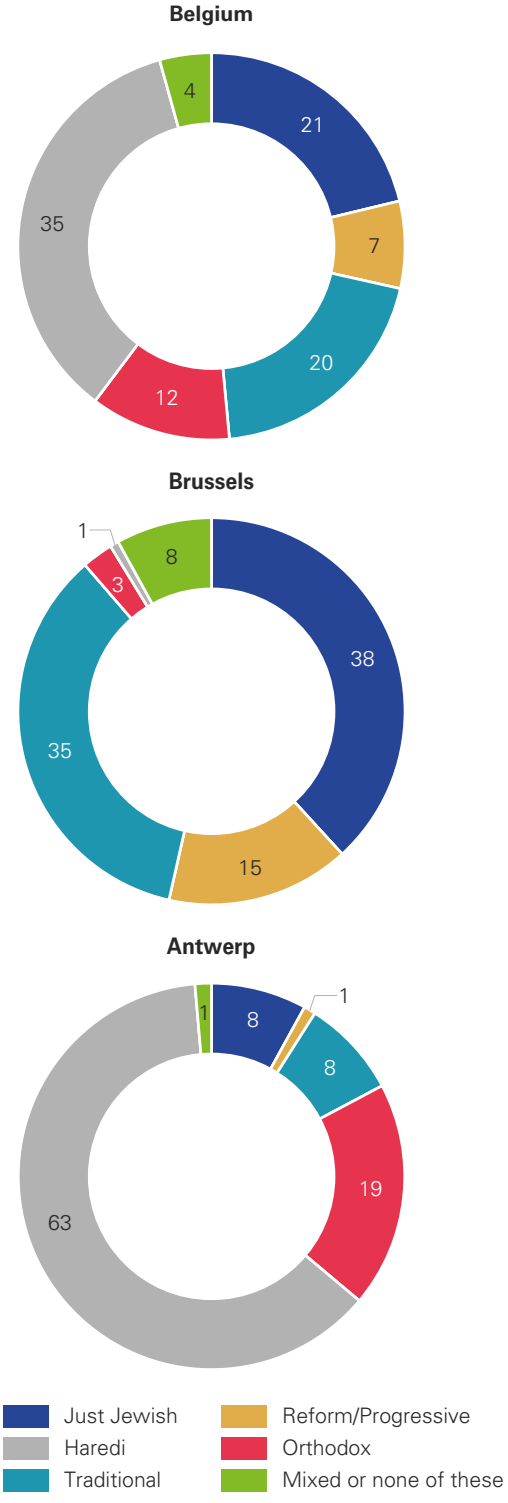
the departure from Jewishness is much more likely for the offspring of mixed marriages than it is for the offspring of in-married couples. Yet, as the data testify, some offspring of intermarriage remain in the Jewish fold. In the same way, while noting that Judaism is not a proselytising religion, we note the presence of a significant number of converts to Judaism. These findings call for deeper analysis regarding the role of new joiners in Jewish communities than is possible here.[50]

Religious self-definition

The FRA survey respondents in Belgium were presented with a list of categories of Jewish identity and asked to identify themselves according to that list. We supplemented the survey results with insights from data received from the Belgian Jewish community. In Figure 16 we integrate the two sources to paint a picture of the religious composition of Belgian Jewry.

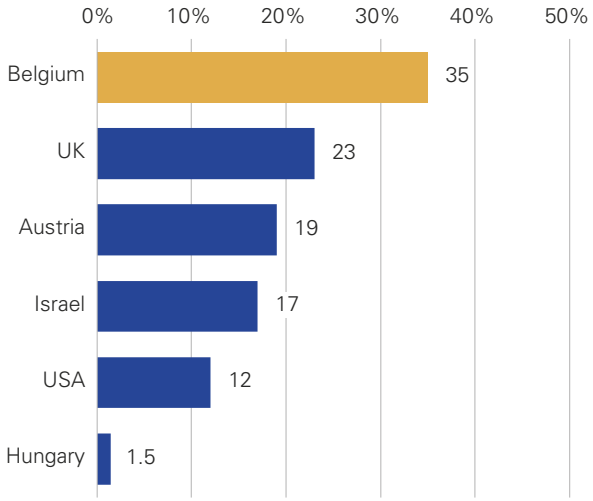
50 See also the international comparisons in DellaPergola, S., and L.D. Staetsky. 2021. *The Jewish identities of European Jews: What, why, and how.* London: Jewish Policy Research Institute JPR, European Jewish Demography Unit.

Figure 16. Self-described identity of the Jewish population in Belgium, around 2020, %



Note: About half of haredi households in Antwerp belong to just three Hasidic movements: Belz, Satmar and Ger. See: Wodzinski, M. 2018. Historical atlas of Hasidism. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
Source: authors' calculations on the basis of the FRA 2018 survey, administrative records of Jewish community, vital statistics and data on Jewish schools in Belgium (see methodological Annex).

Figure 17. Percentage of strictly Orthodox among Jews in Belgium, in comparison to selected Jewish populations



Note: In Israel the percentage shown is out of the total Jewish population.
Sources: (1) Belgium: authors' calculations on the basis of the FRA 2018 survey, administrative records of the Jewish community, vital statistics and data on Jewish schools in Belgium (see methodological Annex); (2) Austria: Staetsky, L.D. and DellaPergola, S. 2020. *Jews in Austria: a demographic and social portrait*. European Jewish Demography Unit/Institute for Jewish Policy Research; (3) Israel, UK, US: Staetsky, L.D. 2022. *How many haredi Jews? A note on estimates and trends*. European Jewish Demography Unit/Institute for Jewish Policy Research; (4) Hungary: Kovács, A. and Barna, I. 2018. *Zsidok es zsidosag magyarorszagon 2017-ben. Egy zsociologiai kutatas eredmenyei*. Budapest: Szombat, and personal communication with András Kovács, 18/02/2020.

The most remarkable feature of the religious composition of the Belgian Jewish population is the high proportion of the strictly Orthodox. Indeed, among Belgian Jews, haredim comprise the largest single group (35%). Whilst in Brussels the haredi presence is hardly perceptible, in Antwerp the haredi form a majority (about 60%).

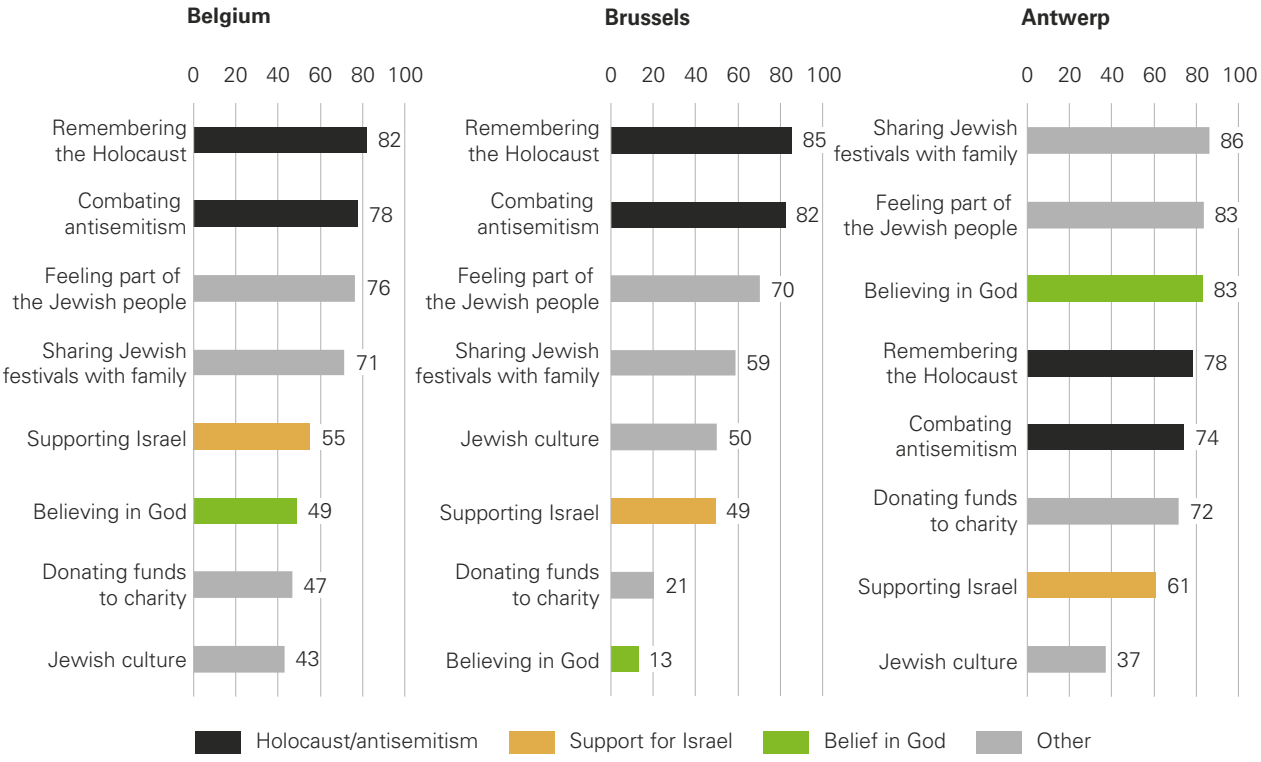
The religious profiles of Brussels and Antwerp differ widely. In Antwerp the haredi and Orthodox together account for about 80% of all Jews (compared to about 4% in Brussels). In Brussels, the largest religious groups – of almost equal size – are those identifying as 'Just Jewish' or 'Traditional', together representing just over 70% of all Jews in the city.

Belgium is the country with the highest proportion of haredim among Jews not only in Europe, but in the world as a whole (Figure 17).

What aspects of Jewishness are most important to Belgian Jews?

Several questions in the 2018 FRA survey attempted to evaluate the respondents' mental and emotional worlds, their priorities when it came to their Jewish identities and the prevalence of specific behavioural patterns rooted in Jewish tradition. This information allows us to go beyond the dry conventional labels (such as Just Jewish or Orthodox) and build a picture of what matters most to Belgian Jews when it comes to their Jewishness. For example, the respondents were asked about how important certain aspects of Jewishness were for their own sense of Jewish identity. The list of aspects included belief in God, sharing Jewish festivals with family, supporting Israel, Jewish culture, combating antisemitism, remembering the Holocaust, donating funds to charity and feeling part of the Jewish People. For the Belgian Jewish population as a whole, the aspects which were clearly the most important were remembering the Holocaust, combating antisemitism, feeling part of the Jewish People and sharing Jewish festivals with family. Each of these aspects was 'very important' in the eyes of 70%–80% of Belgian Jews. Supporting Israel was very important for 55% of Jews. All other aspects, namely Jewish culture, belief in God and donating to charity were very important to 40%–50% of them (Figure 18). This order of importance is rather typical of Western European Jewish populations.[51]

Figure 18. Items very important for Belgian Jewish identity, around 2020, %



Source: authors' calculations on the basis of the FRA 2018 survey, administrative records of the Jewish community, vital statistics and data on Jewish schools in Belgium.

51 DellaPergola, S., and L.D. Staetsky. 2021. *The Jewish identities of European Jews: What, why, and how.* London: Jewish Policy Research Institute JPR, European Jewish Demography Unit.

With respect to the hierarchy of these aspects of Jewishness, the contrast between Jews in Brussels and in Antwerp is significant. The greatest contrast is observed in relation to the importance of believing in God. As one would expect, given the religious profiles of these subpopulations, believing in God is quite central to Jewish identity in the traditionally Jewish Antwerp and more marginal in the more secular Brussels. It should also be noted that aspects of memory (remembering the Holocaust) and existential concerns (antisemitism) are very important in both contexts. Even though in Brussels they occupy the top of the hierarchy of very important aspects, an absolute majority in Antwerp see these aspects as very important too. They are simply overshadowed by the religious aspects (believing in God, sharing Jewish festivals with family) and ideas related to peoplehood (feeling part of the Jewish People).

Supporting Israel, for example, while being lower in the hierarchy of aspects is still more central in absolute terms in Antwerp than in Brussels

In general, it should be noted that certain aspects of Jewishness, not just strictly religious ones, appear to be very central in Antwerp in comparison to Brussels. In comparing the two locations, one should pay attention to the absolute importance of aspects in each location (i.e. how many people find a particular aspect important?) not just to their positions relative to each other (i.e. which aspect is more/less important compared to others?). Supporting Israel, for example, while being lower in the hierarchy of aspects is still more central in absolute terms in Antwerp (where it is seen as very important by 61% of the respondents) than in Brussels (where it is seen as very important by 49%). This contradicts the common supposition that the haredi subpopulation neglects its support for Israel in favour of an exclusively religious outlook.

Observance of Jewish practices among Belgian Jews

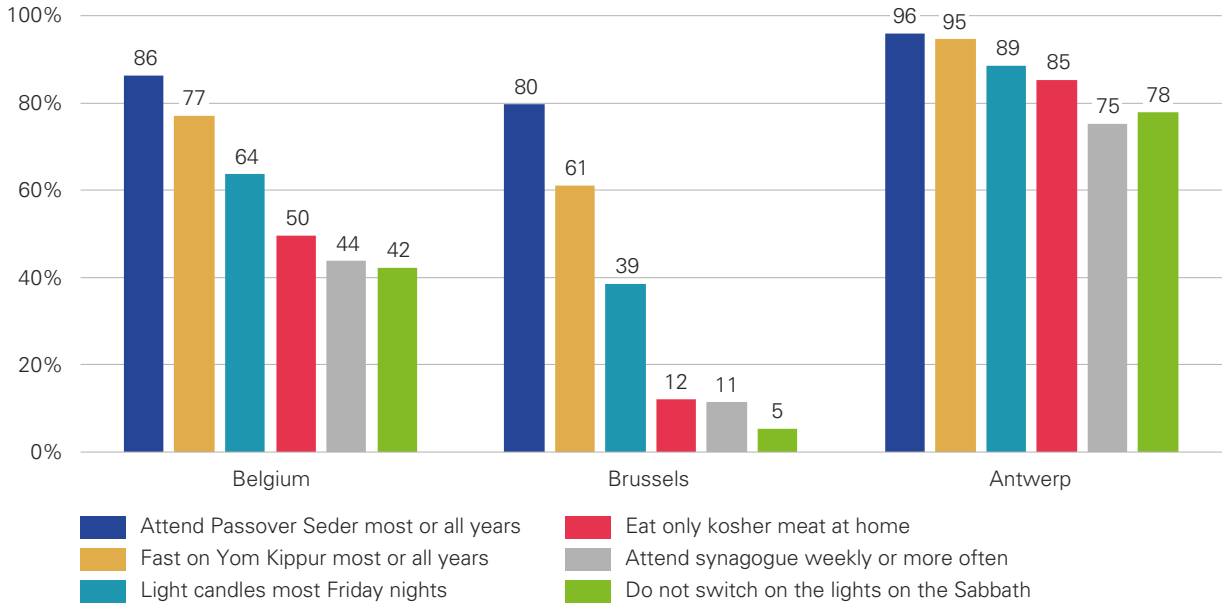
The observance of Jewish dietary laws (kashrut), the observance and celebration of the Sabbath as a day of rest, and circumcision of male infants are all ancient Jewish religious and cultural customs. Since ancient times they marked Jews out as a particular group, distinct from others. Over the centuries, these and other customs, such as congregating for prayer, religious study, fast days and Passover celebrations have attracted the attention of non-Jews among whom Jews lived. Depending on time and place, this attention could be curious, bemused or critical, but rarely totally neutral.[52]

Figure 19 shows the levels of observance of several Jewish practices that were examined in the 2018 FRA survey. It is clear that less frequent and time-consuming practices, such as attending a Passover seder and fasting on Yom Kippur, are observed by a majority of Jews in Belgium, both in Brussels and Antwerp. Weekly synagogue attendance, keeping kosher and not switching on lights on Sabbath – all of which are more demanding, frequent and time-consuming practices that are conditioned on stronger religiosity – are observed by about 40%–50% of Jews in Belgium: not a majority, but a very significant proportion.

Here, as before, Brussels and Antwerp reveal strong contrasts. In Antwerp, the absolute majority of Jews observe all listed Jewish practices. By contrast, in Brussels, majorities only attend a Passover seder and fast on Yom Kippur. Indeed, only around 10% attend synagogue weekly and eat kosher at home and only 5% of Jews in Brussels do not switch

52 For detailed and engaging accounts of the awareness of non-Jews of these Jewish customs in the ancient world the reader can reach to: (1) Gruen, E. 2002. *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, and (2) Johnson, P. 2004. *A history of the Jews*. London: The Orion Publishing Group.

Figure 19. Observance of selected Jewish practices by Jews in Belgium, around 2020, %



Source: authors' calculations on the basis of the FRA 2018 survey, administrative records of the Jewish community, vital statistics and data on Jewish schools in Belgium.

on lights on the Sabbath. Yet this low level of halachic observance of the Sabbath among Jews in Brussels does not mean that they do not mark it in any way – on the contrary, almost 40% light Sabbath candles on Friday night. Notably, the ranking of different Jewish rituals is the same in the two major communities, in spite of the substantial gap in observance frequencies.

The prevalence of the practice of circumcision could be established on the basis of the administrative sources of the Belgian Jewish community, namely the records kept by *mohelim* (traditional performers of circumcision). We estimate that about 95% of male Jewish infants in Belgium are circumcised. In Antwerp the practice is close to universal, while at Brussels it stands minimally at about 78%.[53] The levels of adherence to the practice of circumcision in Brussels are very similar to the levels recorded in the mainstream British Jewish population.

Just Jewish, Traditional, Progressive, Orthodox, haredi: what lies behind denominational labels?

Up until now we have been investigating Jewish identity in Belgium by stressing the differences between two geographical locations – Brussels and Antwerp. But it is also instructive to consider it through a denominational lens. Respondents to the 2018 FRA survey were variously invited to self-identify as Traditional, Progressive, Orthodox, haredi or 'Just Jewish.' What are the similarities and differences between these groups? We have already seen that the FRA survey provides a wealth of information about how Belgian Jews practice Judaism, and what they consider central to their Jewishness. In addition, respondents to the survey were asked several questions to clarify their degree of religiosity, the strength of their

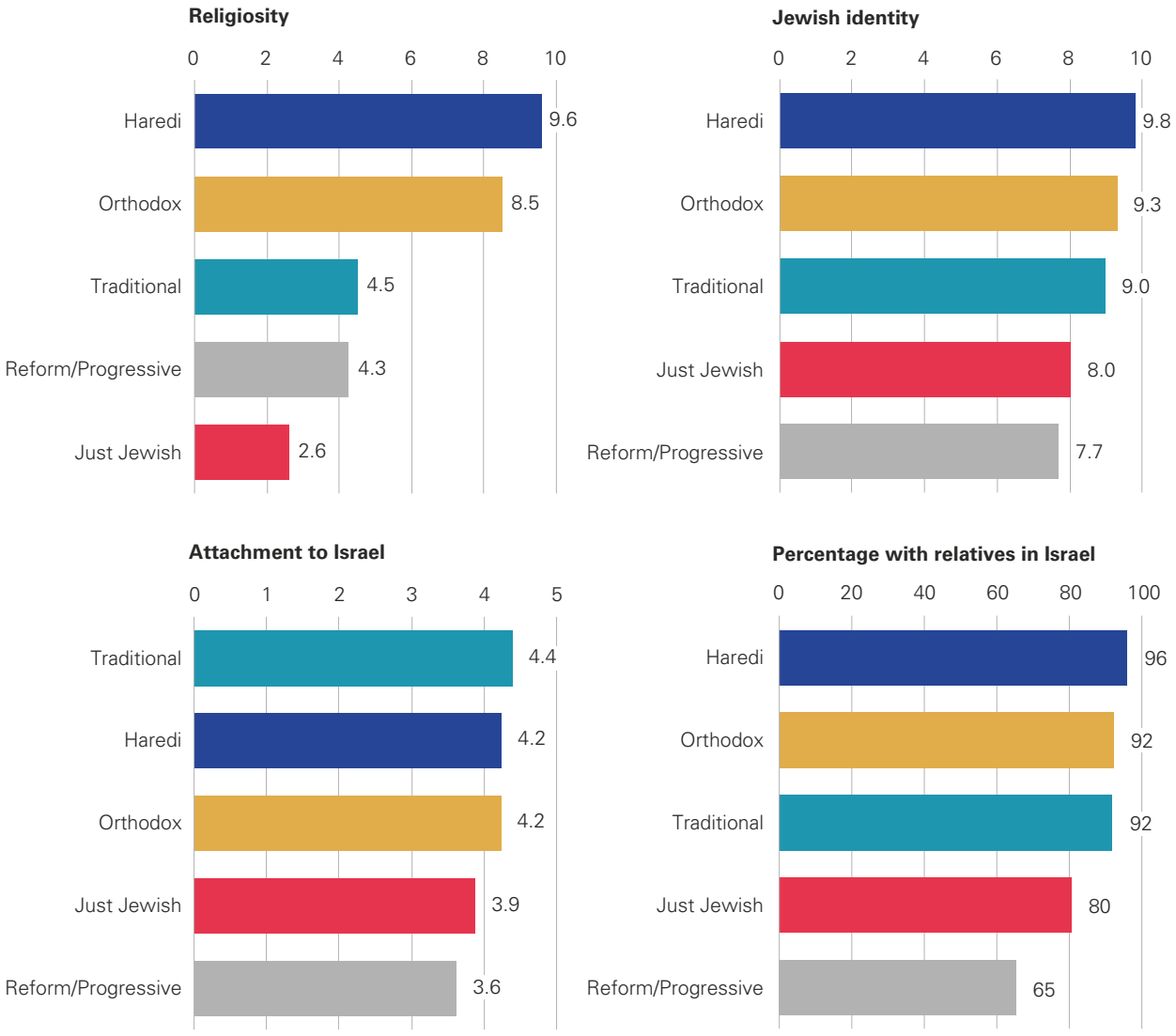
53 The annual number of total Jewish births suggested by the records shared with us by Brussels' mohelim is approximately 88. We obtained this estimate by multiplying about 45 male circumcisions that take place annually in Brussels by the sex ratio at birth at a level of 1.95. Assuming that the total Jewish population of Brussels is about 11,000 and its age structure resembles the age structure of the British mainstream Jewish population, 112 annual births are expected. Thus, we estimate the proportion of births suggested by the records of the mohelim out of the total number of Jewish births as 78% (88/112*100).

Jewish identity and their attachment to Israel. Cross-referencing all of these with the picture of self-definition expressed in denominational labels provides an insight into the psychological and emotional worlds behind the labels.

Respondents were asked how religious they were on a scale of one to ten, with ten being very religious, as well as how strong their Jewish identity was, also on a scale of one to ten, with ten being very strong. The nature of the respondents' connection to Israel was gauged by asking them how attached they felt to Israel (on a scale of one to five, with five being very strongly attached) and whether they had family or relatives living in Israel (Figure 20).

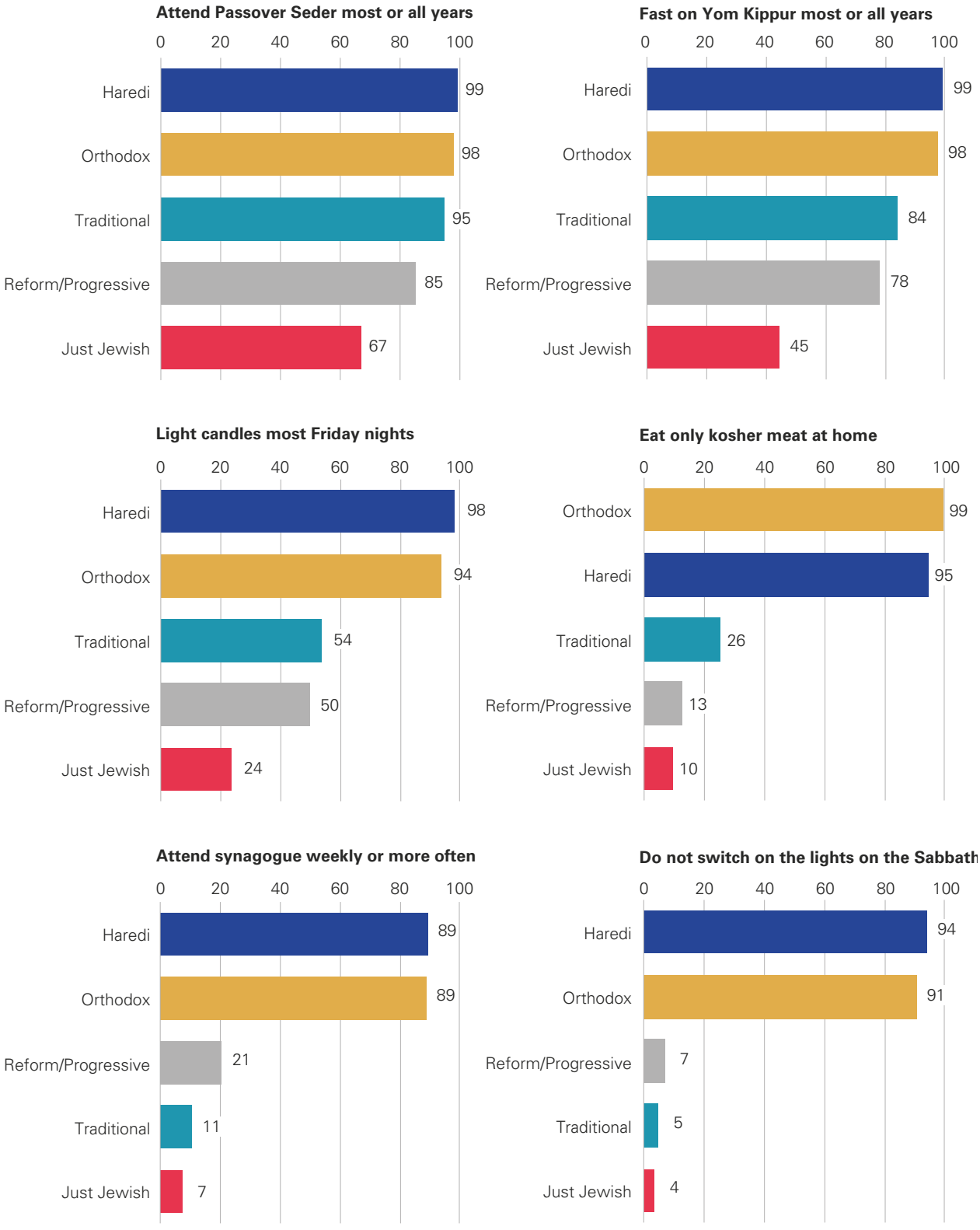
The haredi, Orthodox and Traditional groups consistently score highest on all four variables: their religiosity is highest, and their Jewish identity and attachments to Israel strongest in the comparison. Reform/Progressive and Just Jewish

Figure 20. Religiosity, Jewish identity and connection to Israel among Jews in Belgium, by denomination, around 2020



Note: Unweighted counts: Just Jewish N=248, Reform/Progressive N=83, Traditional N=211, Orthodox N=73, Haredi N=110.
Source: 2018 FRA survey.

Figure 21. Observance of selected Jewish practices by Jews in Belgium, by denomination, around 2020, %



Note: Unweighted counts: Just Jewish N=248, Reform/Progressive N=83, Traditional N=211, Orthodox N=73, Haredi N=110.
Source: 2018 FRA survey.

display the lowest scores. It is noteworthy that the greatest difference between groups (and the steepest gradient in the graph) is observed with respect to religiosity. Groups are closer to each other when it comes to the measurements of Jewish identity and attachment to Israel.

The picture is similar with respect to Jewish practices (Figure 21). Observance of all practices tested in the survey is nearly universal among haredi and Orthodox Jews. The 'Just Jewish' and Reform/Progressive groups show lower levels of observance on all practices. Observance of the more demanding practices (not switching on lights on the Sabbath, attending synagogue weekly or more often, and eating kosher at home) is something that only a small minority of those in the Just Jewish and Reform/Progressive groups do. In addition, it is important to note that a majority of Jews across all denominations commonly attend a Passover seder and fast on Yom Kippur. A majority of the Just Jewish, the least observant group, attend a Passover seder, and a very significant proportion of them fast on Yom Kippur.

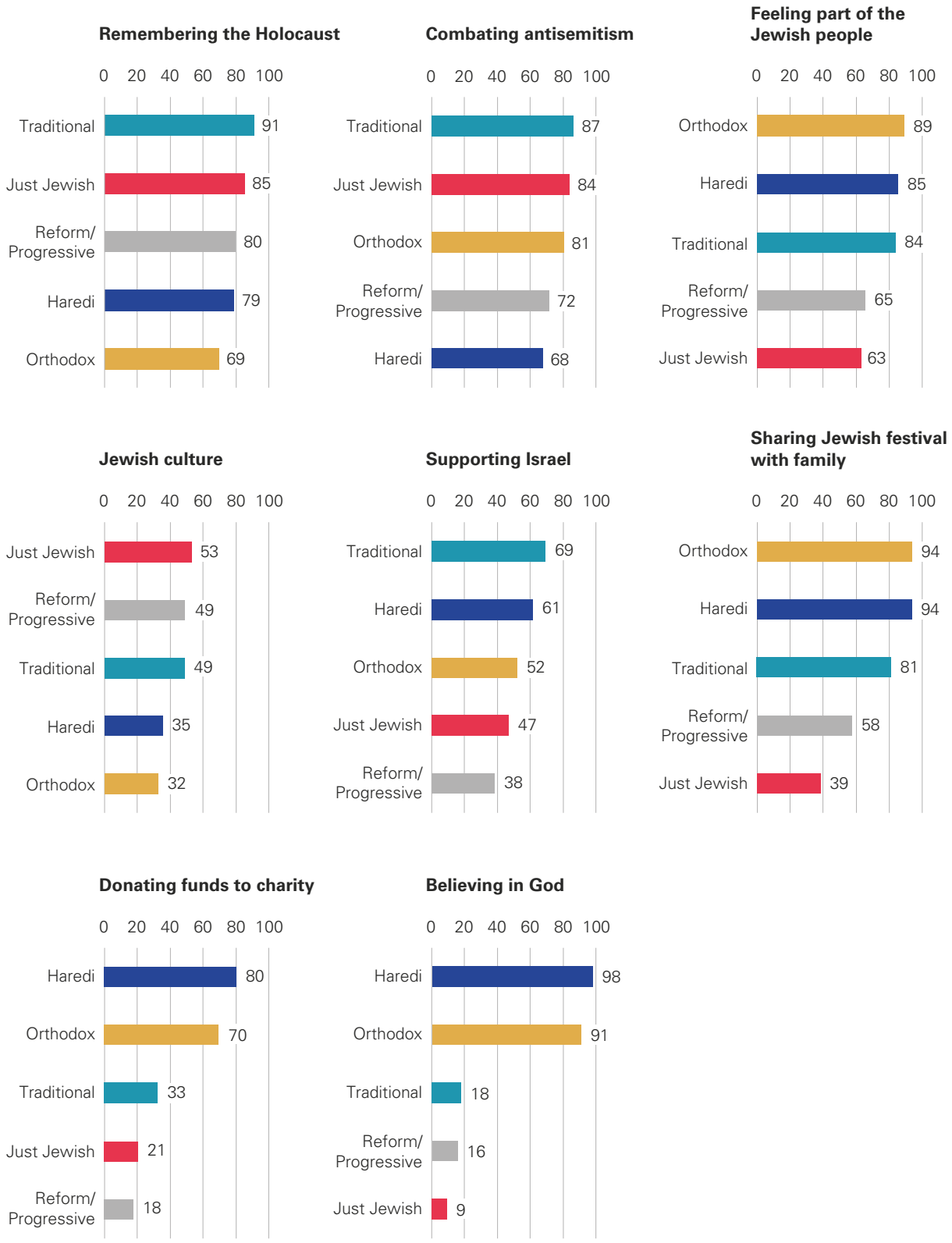
All communal, peoplehood-related and religious aspects are clearly much more important to the haredi, Orthodox and Traditional groups than to the Just Jewish and Progressive ones

Looking at the items considered very important for people's Jewish identity (Figure 22), aspects of Holocaust remembrance and concerns related to antisemitism are the most consensual of all. They are marginally more important to the Just Jewish, Traditional and Progressive groups than to the Orthodox and haredi ones, but the differences are small. The gap between the denominations begins to appear when it comes to communal aspects and peoplehood (e.g. feeling part of the Jewish People, supporting Israel, sharing Jewish festivals with family), and it is especially large with respect to donating to charity and belief in God. All communal, peoplehood-related and religious aspects are clearly much more important to the haredi, Orthodox and Traditional groups than to the Just Jewish and Progressive ones. Only on one item do the Just Jewish attribute greater importance than all of the other groups: interest in Jewish culture. They are also the only group with more than 50% thinking that this aspect is very important to them.

If one attempts to elucidate a unifying theme behind the large amount of detail, it may be helpful to think of Jewish identity as a three-pillar structure.[54] The supporting pillars are religion (both belief and observance), peoplehood/family/Israel, and memory/survival. Among the haredi and Orthodox, all three pillars are present and equally strong. As one moves away from the haredi/Orthodox part of the spectrum, the memory/survival pillar remains strong but the other two – the peoplehood/family/Israel pillar and especially the religious one, weaken considerably. Arguably, the Jewish identity of the Just Jewish group is based on two pillars alone, as it lacks almost entirely any elements of the religious pillar. The Jewish identity of the Reform/Progressive group is an intermediate type. It lies in-between the haredi/Orthodox and Just Jewish: the religious pillar of Reform/Progressive Jewish identity is considerably weaker than haredi/Orthodox identity, but it is stronger than the Just Jewish.

54 DellaPergola and Staetsky, *The Jewish identities of European Jews*, cit.

Figure 22. Items very important for Belgian Jewish identity, around 2020, %



Note: Unweighted counts: Just Jewish N=248, Reform/Progressive N=83, Traditional N=211, Orthodox N=73, Haredi N=110.
Source: 2018 FRA survey.

Jewish schools

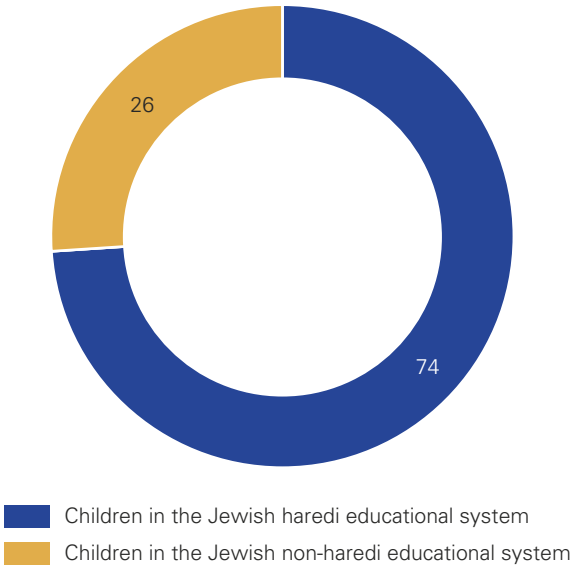
Belgium has a well-developed system of faith education. In both the French and the Flemish parts of Belgium, there is an established tradition of faith schools. Many faith schools, including Jewish ones, are financially supported by communities. In addition, instruction in Judaism is offered across non-Jewish schools to those who desire it.

Two Jewish schools exist today in Brussels: Beth Aviv (a primary school for ages 6–11 years) and Athénée Ganenou (operating both a primary facility for those aged 6–11, and a secondary one for those aged 12–17 years). Both schools are co-educational and cater for a non-strictly Orthodox Jewish population in keeping with the religious makeup of the Jewish population of Brussels. Both operate early childhood educational facilities (nurseries). Maimonides, an old Jewish school previously located in central Brussels, closed its doors in 2016 following several years of numerical decline in its pupil body, due to a significant extent to the gradual movement of the Jewish population towards the suburbs. Some degree of demographic decline, (i.e. an actual decline in the number of Jewish children in a population as a whole), may have played a role as well but, at least since the beginning of the twenty-first century, this factor could not have been important, let alone decisive. The numbers in the other two Jewish schools were stable at the time that Maimonides declined.

Around 2020, 650 children attended either Beth Aviv and Athénée Ganenou at the primary and secondary levels of education, of whom about 370 were at the primary level.[55] Combining these figures with the estimates of the number of Jewish children in the population as a whole, suggests that about 60% of Jewish children of primary school age and about 40% of Jewish children of secondary school age in Brussels are educated in Jewish schools. Across the mandatory school age range (6–17 years), about 50% of Jewish children in Brussels are in Jewish schools. Taking into consideration the Jewish children in non-Jewish schools who receive some instruction in Judaism, brings the proportion of Jewish children receiving some form of Jewish education in Brussels to 65% of all Jewish children of mandatory school age.

In Antwerp, there is a well-developed system of haredi Jewish education, which is in part independent and in part state-sponsored. The state-sponsored system of Jesode Hatora-Beth Jacob includes about 700 pupils across the primary and secondary educational stages (6–17 years) alone. The entire state-sponsored system of haredi schools (featuring, in addition, Benoth Jerusalem, Bais Chinuch, Wiznitz and other schools) is estimated to include about 1,600 pupils.[56] We estimate that about 1,300 (46%) of all haredi children aged 6–17 years in Antwerp are educated in independent,

Figure 23. Composition of Jewish schools in Belgium, %



Note: the estimates relate to ages 6/7 years to 17/18 years (mandatory school age in Belgium).
Source: authors' calculations on the basis of the administrative records of Jewish community, vital statistics and data on Jewish schools in Belgium (see methodological Annex).

55 Source of data (school year 2019–2020): Educational authority of Wallonia-Brussels Federation, Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles. Brussels and Belgium more broadly have several youth movements. A full account of these movements can be found in: Centre Communautaire Laïc Juif. 2019. Qui sont les jeunes Juifs de Bruxelles?

56 Source of data (school year 2019–2020): Flemish educational authority.

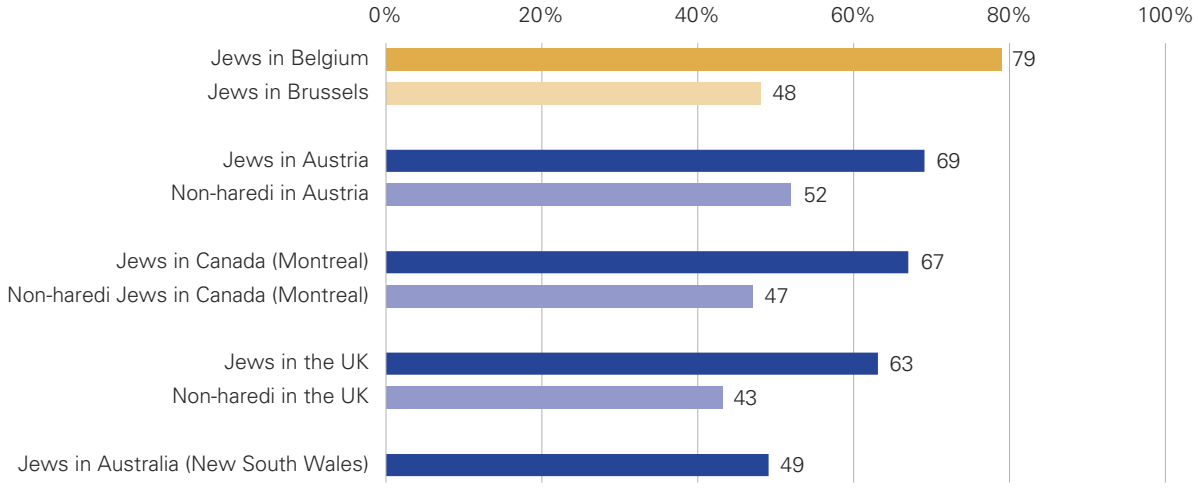
(i.e. private) haredi schools.[57] The non-haredi system of Jewish schools in Antwerp is represented by the Tachkemoni and Yavne schools, with about 400 pupils across the primary and secondary stages.

The situation of Jewish schools in Belgium is summarised in Figures 23 and 24. Haredi children form a significant majority (74%) in the population of Jewish children of mandatory school age educated in Jewish schools in Belgium.

The uptake of Jewish schools by Jewish children in Belgium is among the highest in countries with developed systems of Jewish schools: 79% (Figure 24). If the instruction in Judaism for those attending non-Jewish schools is taken into account, 84% of all Jewish children in Belgium receive some form of formal Jewish education.

The reasons why Belgian Jewish parents choose to send their children to a Jewish school or not are outlined in Figure 25. The similarities and differences in this regard between haredi and non-haredi parents are clear. The common feature for both groups is instilling a strong Jewish identity in their children: this is the reason to choose a Jewish school for 92% of haredim and 75% of non-haredim. The scope and intensity of the religious content in their sense of Jewish identity varies between groups, but not the basic desire to instil some sense of a Jewish identity in their children. This priority overshadows all other priorities in both groups.

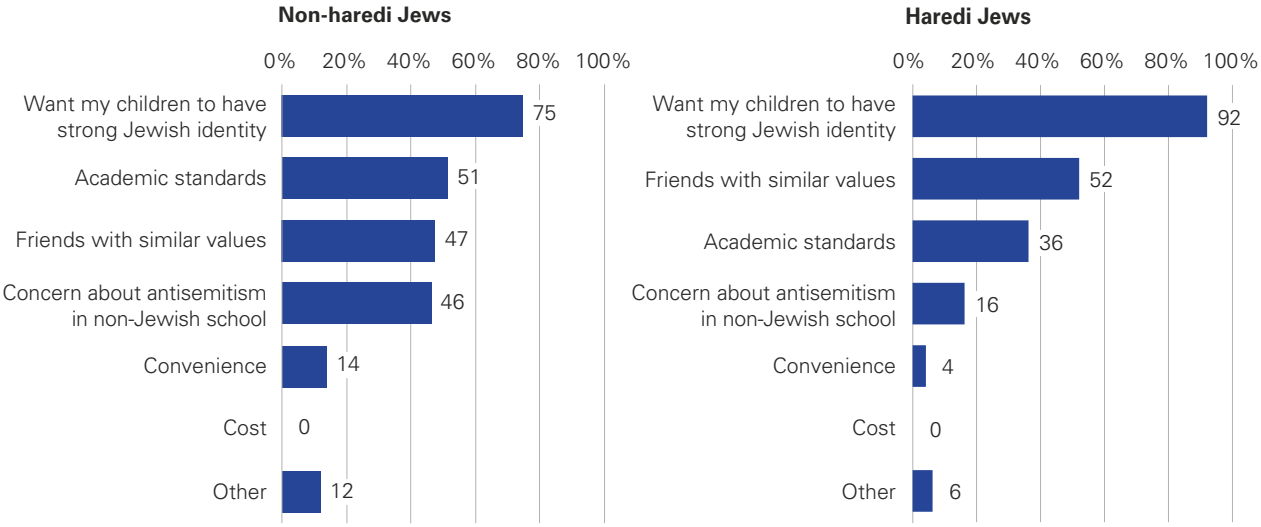
Figure 24. Uptake of Jewish schools by Jewish children in Belgium and selected Jewish populations, %



Note: in Belgium, the estimates relate to ages 6/7 years to 17/18 years (mandatory school age in Belgium); in Austria, the estimates reflect the situation at ages 6/7 years to 14/15 years (mandatory schools age in Austria); in relation to other countries, an attempt has been made to present the estimates that are maximally comparable to the Belgian estimates: in the UK the figures relate to children aged 4–17 years, in Canada – to children aged 6–12 years (elementary school), in Australia – to children aged 5 to 12 years (primary school).
Sources: (1) Belgium – authors' calculations on the basis of the FRA 2018 survey, administrative records of Jewish community, vital statistics and data on Jewish schools in Belgium (see methodological Annex); (2) Austria – authors' calculations on the basis of the data on Jewish births in the Austrian vital registration system, administrative records of the Federation of Austrian Jewish Communities and Jewish schools in Vienna; (3) Canada – figures for Canada have been sent to the authors by Charles Shahar, Chief Researcher for Federation CJA, and they are estimates based on the Census data and statistics on Jewish schools; (4) UK – Staetsky, L. D. and Boyd, J. 2016. *The rise and rise of Jewish schools in the United Kingdom: numbers, trends and policy issues*. London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research, p.11; (5) Australia (state of New South Wales, a home to 41% of the Australian Jewish population) – Graham, D. 2014. *The Jewish population of New South Wales. Key findings from the 2001 Census*. JCA, p.43.

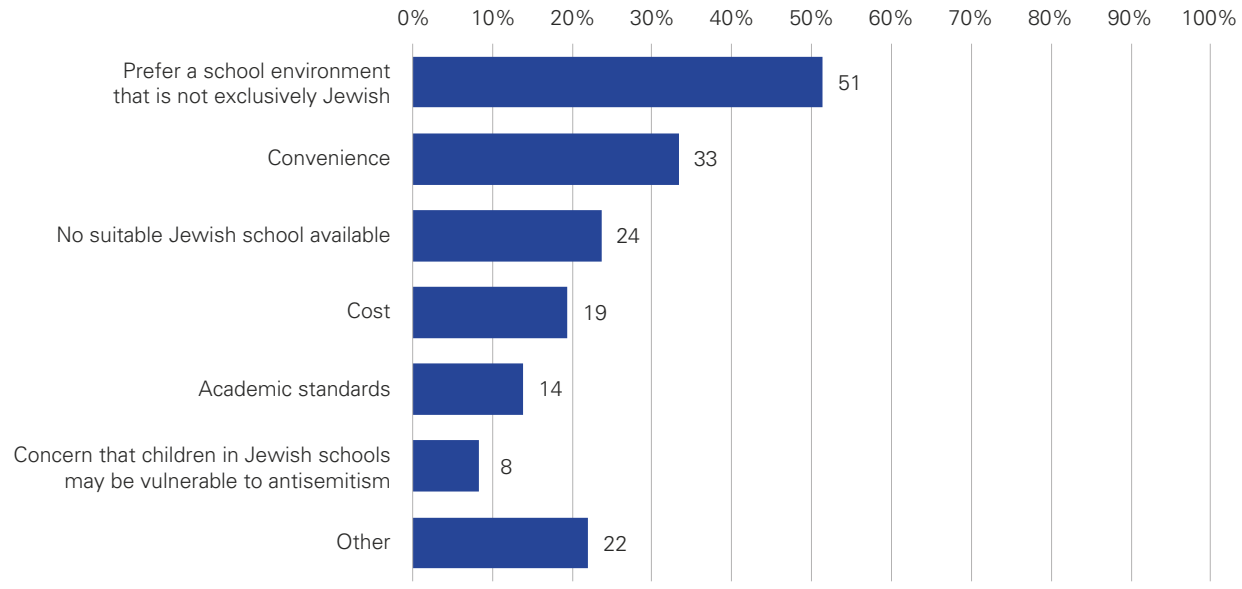
57 This estimation is based on the estimated number of haredi children aged 6–17 years in Antwerp (about 2,900). This number results from the application of the known age distribution of the haredi population in the United Kingdom to 10,000 (the estimated size of the total haredi population).

Figure 25. Reasons for choosing a Jewish school for their children, as reported by parents in the Belgian Jewish community, %



Source: 2018 FRA survey. Unweighted number of haredi parents: 81. Number of non-haredi parents =183.

Figure 26. Reasons for choosing a non-Jewish school for their children, as reported by parents in the Belgian Jewish community, %



Source: 2018 FRA survey. Number of non-haredi parents =121.

The differences between the haredi and non-haredi groups are most conspicuous with regard to the role of academic standards and concern about antisemitism in non-Jewish schools. While academic standards are secondary to Jewish identity for both groups, haredi parents rank them lower than non-haredi parents. The concern about potentially encountering antisemitism in a non-Jewish school is as powerful a matter as academic standards for the non-haredi groups, while it is of much lesser importance for the haredi group.

For the non-haredi groups, the chief reason for choosing a non-Jewish school is the desire to avoid an exclusively Jewish educational environment, followed by convenience – i.e. that a chosen non-Jewish school is closer to home, or easier to travel to (Figure 26). This picture is similar, perhaps not in every single detail but in essentials, to the picture of preferences for schooling observed in Austria.[58] Non-haredi parents choosing Jewish schools do so primarily for reasons of Jewish identity, but the importance attached to the academic quality of those schools follows quite closely behind. By contrast, those choosing non-Jewish schools tend to do so not because of lack of choice or other constraints, but rather because this is their genuine preference. Policy makers in the area of Jewish educational provision should carefully consider the meaning of these findings.

Jews and non-Jews in Belgium

The picture of Jewish/non-Jewish relations in Belgium is typical for Western Europe in the early twenty-first century. The level of unambiguous negativity towards Jews in the general population of Belgium is low. According to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) surveys of antisemitic attitudes, in 2019, 9% of Belgians described their attitude towards Jews as unfavourable. A higher proportion, about one quarter of the Belgian population, may hold attitudes considered antisemitic, e.g. 'Jews have too much control over global affairs'.[59] Similar results have been obtained by the survey sponsored by the Action and Protection League.[60] ADL surveys indicate that there has been no discernible change in the volume of negativity towards Jews in Belgium since the beginning of the twenty-first century.

An unfavourable opinion of Israel is considerably more widespread in Belgium compared to an unfavourable opinion of Jews – it can be found among half of the Belgian population (49%). To put these figures in context: 22% of Belgians said they held an unfavourable view of Muslims, and 40% said they held an unfavourable view of Palestine. Thus, negativity towards Muslims is higher than negativity towards Jews, whereas negativity towards Israel and the Palestinians exists at similar levels to each other. An important caveat: there are vast differences in attitudes to Jews within the Belgian population. For example, among Muslims in Belgium, the prevalence of anti-Jewish attitudes is 2–3 times higher than among the general population. In essentials, the described dynamics of Jewish/non-Jewish relations in Belgium are rather similar to those observed elsewhere across Western Europe.

ADL surveys indicate that there has been no discernible change in the volume of negativity towards Jews in Belgium since the beginning of the twenty-first century

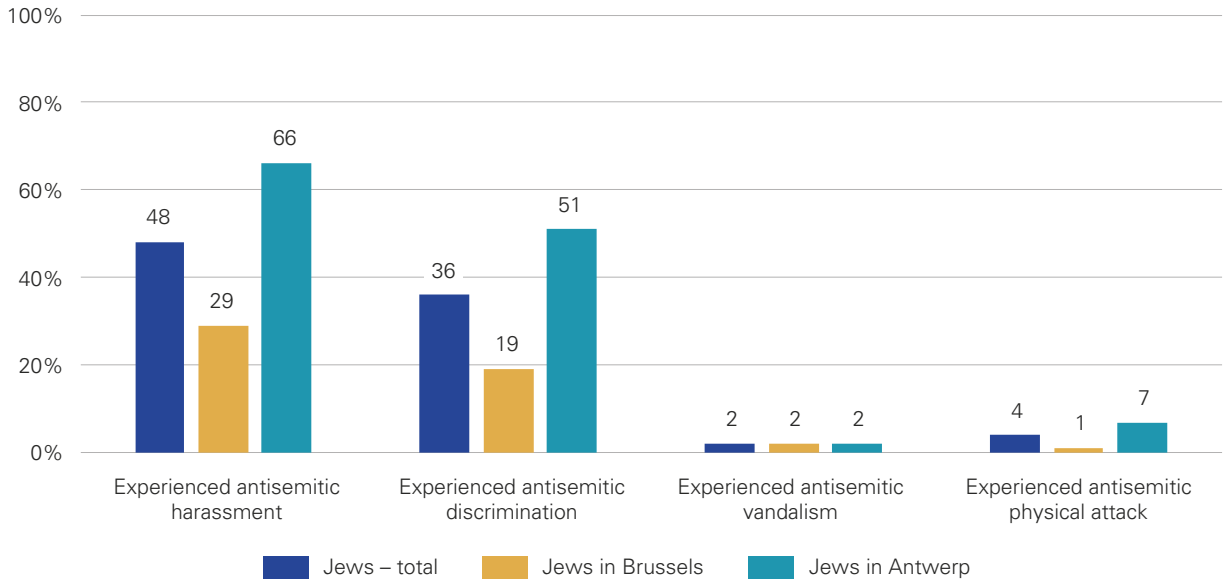
How do Jews in Belgium perceive and experience this situation? Looking at their experiences of antisemitism, two conclusions arise from Figure 27. First, the most prevalent type of antisemitic experience they report involves harassment, defined as being on the receiving end of any of the following: offensive emails or texts; threatening, offensive or silent phone calls, offensive or threatening comments or gestures in person; offensive comments on the Internet; and/or being exposed to unwanted loitering – all in connection with the victim being Jewish. About half of all Jews in Belgium said that they had experienced antisemitic harassment over a twelve-month period (48%). Antisemitic discrimination is somewhat less common – about one third of Belgian Jews said they

58 Staetsky, L.D. and DellaPergola, S. 2020. *Jews in Austria: a demographic and social portrait*. European Jewish Demography Unit/ Institute for Jewish Policy Research, pp. 49–50.

59 Unless stated otherwise, all quoted figures are taken from the global surveys of the Anti-Defamation League, The ADL GLOBAL 100: An Index of Anti-Semitism.

60 Kovacs, A. and Fischer, G. 2021. *Antisemitic prejudices in Europe: survey in 16 European countries*. Action and Protection League, IPSOS SA, Ispira LTD Hungary.

Figure 27. Experiences of antisemitism by Jews of Belgium in the past twelve months, by type, %



Note: Antisemitic harassment is defined as a respondent experiencing one or more of the following: receiving offensive emails or texts; threatening, offensive or silent phone calls; offensive or threatening comments or gestures in person; offensive comments about the respondent on the Internet; incidents of unwanted loitering and waiting which the respondent thought was connected to their Jewishness. Antisemitic vandalism is defined as a respondent experiencing deliberate damage to their car, home or other property which the respondent thought was connected to their Jewishness. Antisemitic physical attack is defined as a respondent experiencing a physical attack which the respondent thought was connected to their Jewishness. Antisemitic discrimination is defined as a respondent experiencing discrimination because of the ethnicity, religion or belief which the respondent thought was connected to their Jewishness. All experiences could be single or multiple during the 12 months preceding the survey.
Source: authors' calculations on the basis of the FRA 2018 survey, administrative records of Jewish community, vital statistics and data on Jewish schools in Belgium.

had experienced it over the same period, and antisemitic vandalism (2%) and physical attacks (4%) occur on a much smaller scale.

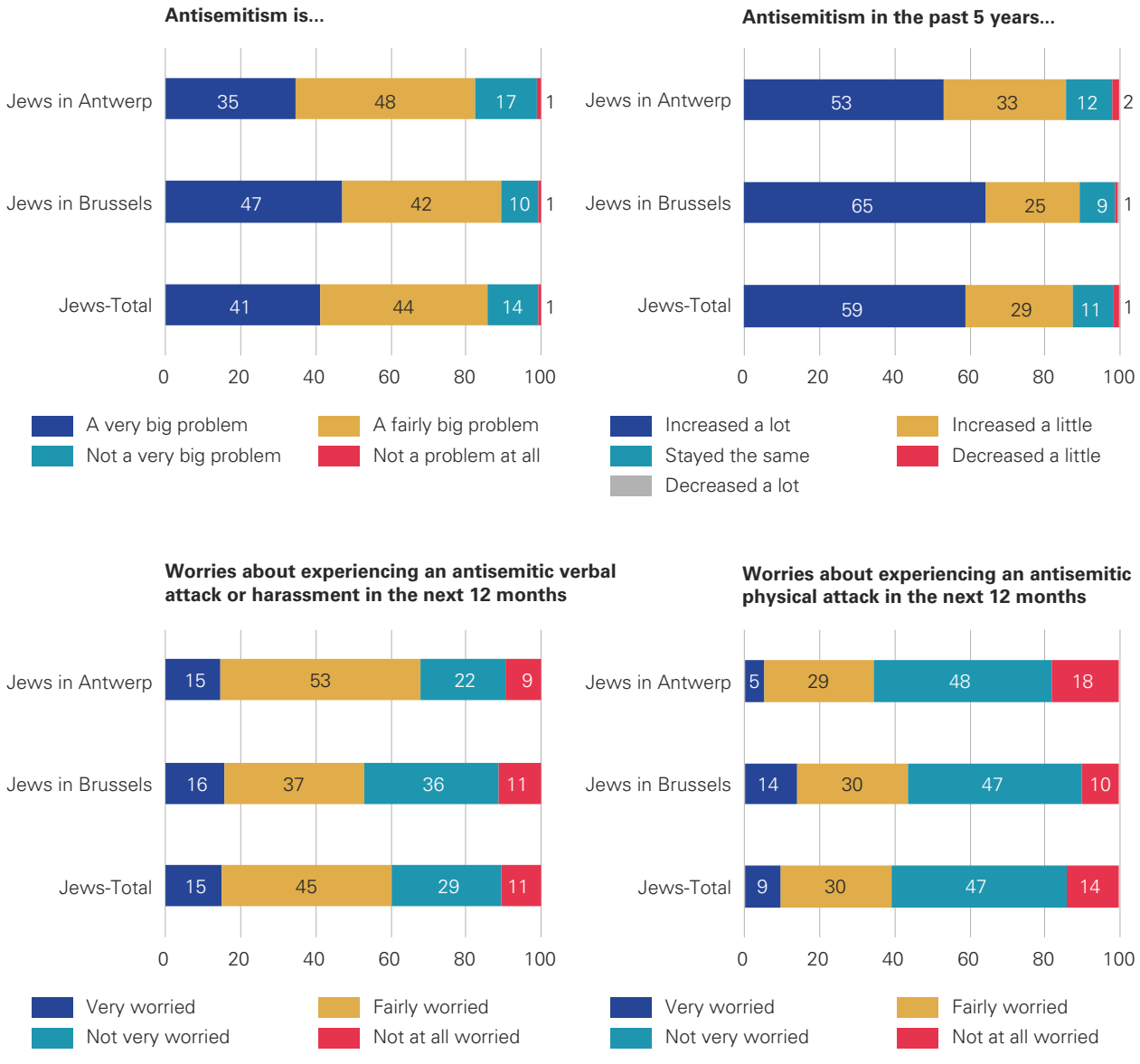
83% of Jews in Belgium consider antisemitism to be a problem, and 41% see it as a 'very big' problem

Second, for all but one type of experiences, victimisation is far more prevalent in Antwerp than in Brussels. Both antisemitic harassment and discrimination are 2–3 times higher in prevalence in Antwerp compared to Brussels. This may be due to the greater visibility of Jews in Antwerp. Non-haredi Jews, like most Jews in Brussels, tend to blend into their social surroundings far more than haredi Jews, so are often unidentifiable as Jews. However, this is far less likely in Antwerp due to its strong haredi population, which can be clearly identified as Jewish due to its distinctive dress.

Despite this, Jews in Brussels are somewhat more likely to consider antisemitism a problem than Jews in Antwerp; strong majorities in both places, and indeed across the country as a whole, say this (Figure 28). 83% of Jews in Belgium consider antisemitism to be a problem, and 41% see it as a 'very big' problem. In that too, Belgian Jews are a rather typical case of a Western European Jewish population.

The proportions of Jews perceiving antisemitism to be a problem and worrying about becoming a victim of antisemitic harassment or assault, both of which affect significant proportions of Jews in Belgium, are similar in Antwerp and Brussels. Given the differences in the

Figure 28. Perceptions of antisemitism by Jews of Belgium in the past twelve months, by type, %

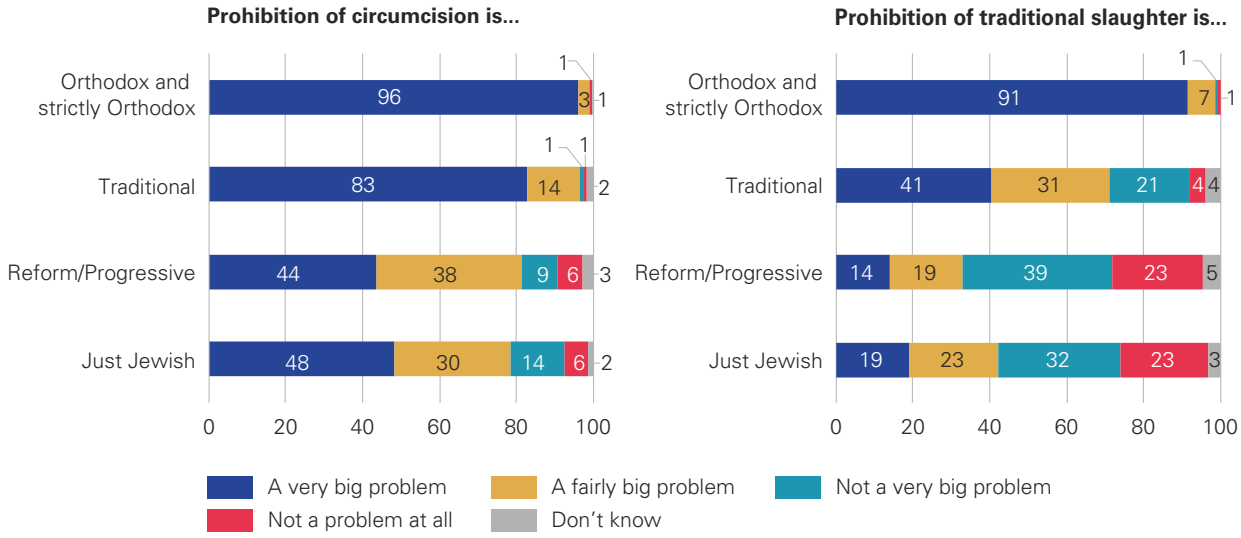


Source: authors' calculations on the basis of the FRA 2018 survey, administrative records of Jewish community, vital statistics and data on Jewish schools in Belgium.

proportions experiencing antisemitism in the two cities, we lack a mature explanation for this phenomenon and can only suggest, hypothetically at this point, that a certain level of victimisation has been 'habitualised' by the Jewish population of Antwerp. They have long been exposed to the current level of victimisation and have become accustomed to it, so possibly normalise it more than Jews in Brussels.

There is one aspect of Jewish/non-Jewish relations in which Belgium's status within the context of European Jewish communities is special although not unique. Belgium is one of a few European countries where negative attitudes towards certain traditional Jewish practices, such as the circumcision of male infants and the traditional method of slaughtering animals for food have developed

Figure 29. Views of Jews in Belgium on how big a ban on circumcision/traditional slaughter would be for them, by denomination, %



Source: 2018 FRA survey.

to the point where governmental policies and legal actions against them have either been seriously considered or already implemented in practice.[61] Opposition to these practices in the West, in Belgium and other places such as the Scandinavian countries, cannot be unambiguously labelled as antisemitic as (1) it often genuinely derives from human rights concerns and (2) it is directed, intentionally and consequentially, both against Jewish and Islamic practices. Rather, it is better seen as part of the increasingly individualistic and 'rights and choices' focused Western culture, with a special emphasis on enlightened care for all forms of life and environmental preservation.[62] Yet, attempts to limit or ban operations connected to these practices represent a significant obstacle to the quality of Jewish life, and this can be clearly seen in the data: 90% of Jews in Belgium perceive a ban on circumcision as a problem (74% think of it as a very big problem); in addition, about 70% of Jews perceive a ban on traditional slaughter as a problem (54% think of it as a very big problem). Whilst Figure 29 confirms that these perceptions are differentiated by degree of religiosity, it is instructive to note that solid majorities – about 80% – of Jews identifying as Reform/Progressive and 'Just Jewish', both of which are less traditionally observant groups, perceive a possible ban on circumcision as a problem. With respect to the ban on traditional slaughter, the proportion of Reform/Progressive and Just Jewish for whom such a development would be a problem is lower (in the approximate range of 33%–42%), but still quite significant.

61 On the status of brit milah see Belgian federal committee rules against ritual circumcision – National Secular Society (secularism.org.uk). On the status of shechita see EU court upholds Belgian bans on ritual slaughter, dealing a major blow to Jewish and Muslim advocates – Jewish Telegraphic Agency (jta.org).

62 Dencik, L., and K. Marosi. 2018. On Three Distinct Forms of Antisemitism in Contemporary Europe, with a Special Focus on Sweden. In *Anti-Semitism Today and Tomorrow. Global Perspectives on the Many Faces of Contemporary Antisemitism*, ed. M. Shainkman, 1–33. Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press.

3 / Some conclusions

There has been significant uncertainty regarding the size and characteristics of the Jewish population in Belgium for many years. In this study, we have reconstructed and confirmed the size of the Jewish population in Belgium as a whole and particularly in the two major centres, Brussels and Antwerp, which, together, comprise about 95% of all Belgian Jews. According to the various sources at our disposal, we estimate the size of the contemporary Belgian Jewish population at about 29,000, forming 0.25% of the total population of Belgium. If one adds to this non-Jews with familial ties to Jews that would allow immigration to and settlement in Israel under the Law of Return, then the total number would reach 46,000, or 0.4% of the Belgian population. We estimate that the Jewish population of Antwerp today (around 16,000) is more numerous than the Jewish population of Brussels (around 11,000).

The underlying data for these estimates originate from the large-scale project of data collection that the European Jewish Demography Unit at JPR launched in Belgium in 2020–2021. The data collection was modelled on the methodology developed and implemented in the British Jewish community by several generations of scholars. In this methodology, data on numbers of Jewish births and deaths, synagogue membership, numbers of pupils in Jewish schools are all used to estimate population size. Surveys of the Belgian population and the Jewish population in Belgium were also employed.

Our foremost policy recommendation, directed at the Belgian Jewish community and all those concerned with its best interests, is to continue to monitor the sources used here for the ongoing production of population estimates. Data on Jewish deaths and circumcisions are routinely collected in the Jewish community of Belgium, as they are a by-product of the activities of Jewish burial societies and *mohelim* (persons performing the rite of circumcision). Educational authorities in Belgium, both in the French and the Flemish communities, possess significant data on Jewish pupils. The Central Bureau of Statistics in Israel collects data on immigration of Jews from Belgium to Israel. These resources should be regularly assessed to study substantive phenomena, e.g. trends in numbers of Jewish pupils for educational planning, but also to monitor the size of the Belgian Jewish population, and its trajectory of change.

In the meantime, using these and other sources, we have constructed a detailed sociodemographic portrait of Belgian Jews. The demographic and social story of Belgian Jewry is effectively a tale of two Jewish populations: Brussels is numerically dominated by Jews who identify as 'Just Jewish' or Traditional (over 70%, combined); Antwerp is numerically dominated by haredi and Orthodox Jews (about 80%). Thus, the Jews of Brussels and Antwerp are very distinct in terms of the intensity of their religious lives and their socioeconomic situations, but rather less so when it comes to the strength of their Jewish identities, their attachment to Israel, or their perceptions of antisemitism.

Although Jews in Brussels are far less religious than Jews in Antwerp, it would be an overstatement to call Brussels 'secular': about 40% of Jews in Brussels identify as Traditional, Orthodox or haredi, with the majority being Traditional. The levels of intermarriage in Brussels (about one quarter are intermarried) are similar to the levels observed among Jews in other low-intermarriage countries (e.g. the UK). The same applies to the level of synagogue affiliation in Brussels (51%), which is close to the levels observed in high-affiliation countries (e.g. the UK)

and to the level of uptake in Jewish schools (48% of Jewish children of primary schools age are in Jewish schools).

On the whole, the Belgian Jewish population is perhaps Europe's most religious, or traditional community. About one third of all Jews in Belgium and a somewhat higher proportion of all Jewish children are haredi. Neither the United Kingdom nor Austria, two other European countries with a significant presence of haredi Jews, have reached this level.[63] Consequently, levels of synagogue affiliation and enrolment in Jewish schools among Jews in Belgium are among the highest in the Jewish Diaspora. At the same time, the levels of intermarriage are among the lowest in Europe, competing with the highly cohesive and organised Jewish community in Mexico.[64]

Whilst the Jewish population of Brussels may be stagnating or declining, the high proportion of haredi Jews in Antwerp, with its high fertility rates and youthful population structure, signals significant potential of growth

In addition to religious diversity, there are other aspects of diversity of the Jewish population in Belgium that are noteworthy. About 35% of Jews in Belgium are foreign-born and 12% are Israel-born. About 16% of Jews in Belgium possess some form of non-Jewish background (9%) or are of mixed (Jewish/non-Jewish) origin (7%). 22% of Belgian Jews and 36% of Jews in Brussels are non-Ashkenazi, a significant minority. Almost half of non-Ashkenazi Jews consider themselves to be of 'Mixed' (i.e. Ashkenazi/non-Ashkenazi) descent. In this respect Belgium belongs to the group of European countries with Jewish communities characterised by Ashkenazi majorities, unlike the Jewish populations of France, Spain and Italy, all of which are numerically dominated by non-Ashkenazi Jews. The proportional weight of the non-Ashkenazi in Belgium is similar to the weight of the non-Ashkenazi in the United Kingdom (21%) and somewhat lower than it is in Austria (29%).[65]

Population projections produced by the Pew Research Center for different religious groups across the globe project stability for the Belgian Jewish population up to 2050.[66] We think this projection is reasonable; the state of demographic data for Jews in Belgium is still too imperfect to dismiss it or adopt it decisively. However, our work here suggests that growth may be on the cards for the Belgian Jewish population. Whilst the Jewish population of Belgium is 'drained' by migration to Israel and elsewhere, the data indicate that there is some in-migration as well, and, more importantly, that the natural growth in Antwerp will continue to be significant. Whilst the Jewish population of Brussels may be stagnating or declining, the high proportion of haredi Jews in Antwerp, with its high fertility rates and youthful population structure, signals significant potential of growth. Thus, it is possible that for the next quarter of the century some positive growth will be seen. Should it happen, it may bring the Belgian Jewish population to around 40,000, the size estimated in the 1960s and 1970s. It would also mean that the Belgian Jewish population might undergo further de-secularisation by demography, a process that is also underway in Austria and the United Kingdom:

63 The religious composition of the Jewish populations in Austria and the United Kingdom has been presented in: (1) Staetsky, L. D. and DellaPergola, S. 2020. *Jews in Austria: a demographic and social portrait.* European Jewish Demography Unit/JPR; (2) Staetsky, L.D. and Boyd, J. 2015. *What the demography of British Jews tells us about the future of the community.* Institute for Jewish Policy Research; (3) Staetsky, L.D. and Boyd, J. 2016. *The rise and rise of Jewish schools in the United Kingdom: numbers, trends and policy issues.* Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

64 Bokser Liwerant, J. 2016. The changing status of Zionism and Israel in Latin American Jewry. In *Handbook of Israel: The major debates,* eds. Eliezer Ben Rafael, Julius Schoeps, Yitzhak Sternberg and Olag Glokner, 998–1027. Berlin: De Gruyter.

65 All data are from 2018 FRA survey.

66 Pew Research Centre, The Future of world religions: population growth projections, 2010–2050. Religious Composition by Country, 2010–2050 | Pew Research Center (pewforum.org).

the proportion of the haredi and the share of Antwerp among Belgian Jews are expected to increase further.

The critical question from both a demographic and policy point of view, therefore, concerns the volume of Jewish migration from Belgium to Israel and other countries. There is potential for high growth in Antwerp, but the realisation of this growth depends on the volume of emigration. A negative migration balance may severely curtail any gains from high fertility. We have seen that, in Belgium as elsewhere, economic reasons impact on migration levels among Jews: like others, Jews react to any worsening of economic conditions by moving toward stronger and more secure economies. In addition to this factor, Belgian haredi Jews will also move in and out of Belgium in pursuing marriage prospects – as all haredi communities across the world are linked to each other by bonds of marriage.

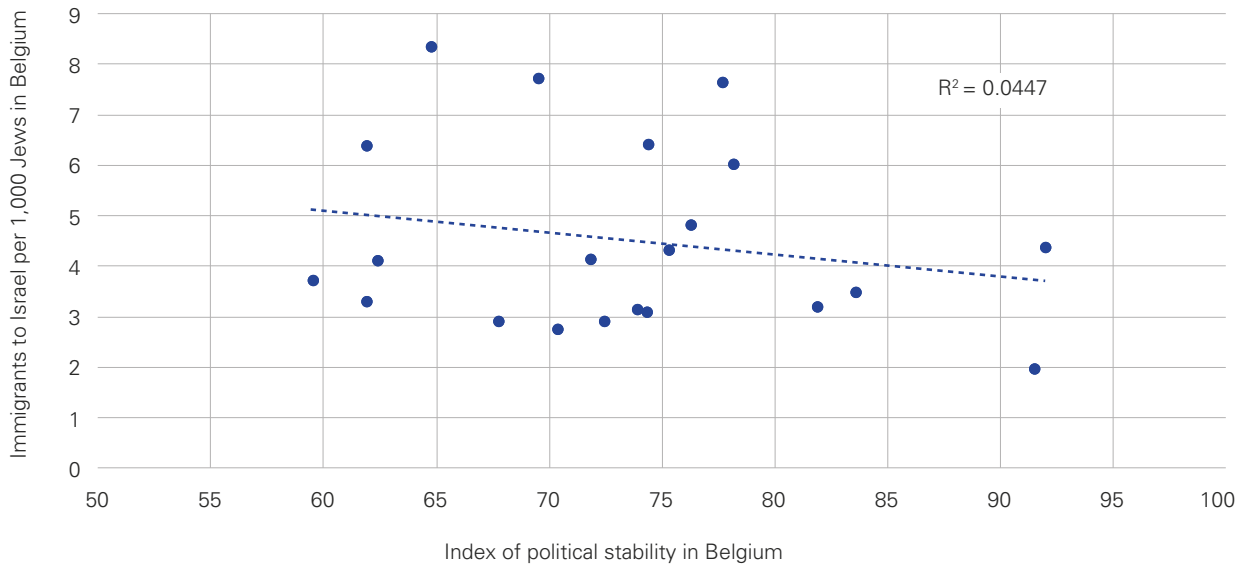
The role of political factors on Jewish migration from Belgium is yet to be clarified. It merits mentioning that Belgium is one of several European countries where some traditional Jewish practices, such as the circumcision of male infants and the kosher slaughter of animals, have come under public scrutiny and have been legally curtailed. It is unclear at present just how far the attempts to limit such practices can and will go. Belgium is not the only European country where such attempts are being made; similar debates are occurring in some Scandinavian countries, e.g. Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Denmark and Finland. The difference between Belgium and Scandinavia is in the size and character of the Jewish community, with the Belgian Jewish community being larger and considerably more religiously observant. The vast majority of Jewish male infants in Belgium are circumcised, and 90% of Belgian Jewish respondents in the 2018 FRA survey stated that a prohibition of circumcision, should it ever happen, would be a 'very big' or a 'fairly big' problem for them. By comparison, in the less traditional Jewish setting of Sweden, 54% of Jews said that the prohibition of circumcision would be a problem.

Thus, the Belgian Jewish community is an arena in which the test of European tolerance is being conducted. We choose to emphasise the issue of tolerance rather than antisemitism here. After all, the opponents of male circumcision in Belgium may not be motivated by any negativity towards Jews *per se*, and a ban on circumcision would affect Muslim communities in Belgium as well. The same is true of the Jewish traditional slaughter of animals for food. Yet fundamentally, the question is whether a traditional Jewish community can exist and prosper in a society where individual rights and choices – inspired by a competing worldview – dominate over the millennial traditions and practices of the Jewish collective.

In sum, these political factors, combined with the demographic norms of fertility and mortality rates and patterns of migration, the external threats of antisemitic harassment and violence and the internal vibrancy and attractiveness of Jewish life will combine to shape the future of the Jewish population in Belgium. Monitoring each of these is fundamental to planning for the community's future.

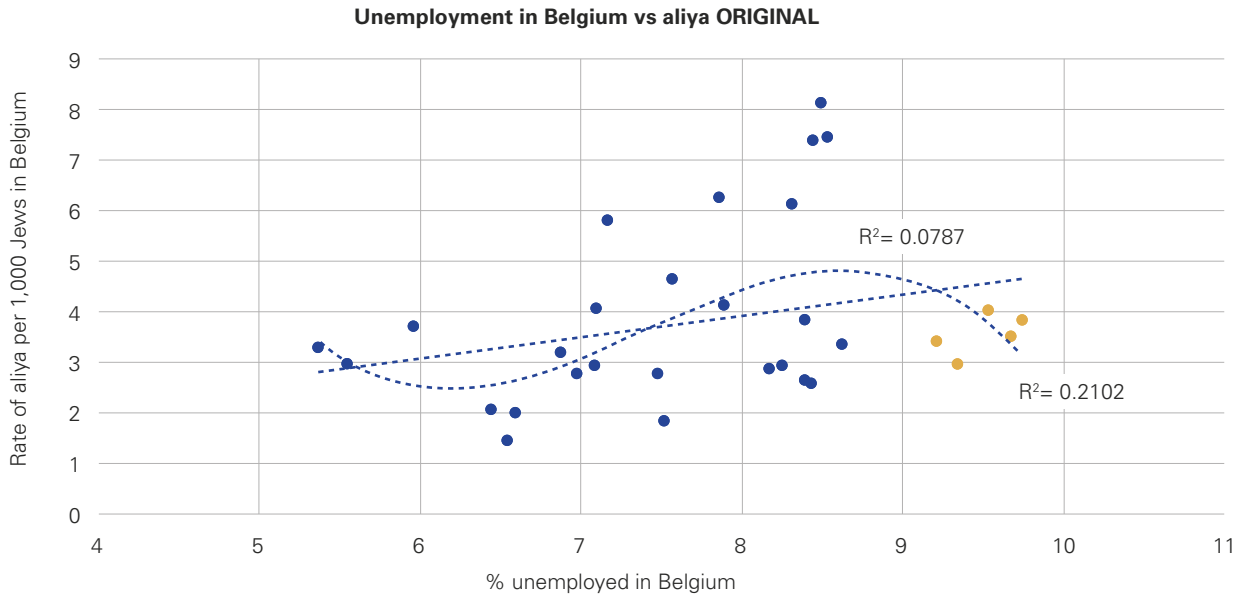
/ Appendix 1: Aliya from Belgium vs political stability and unemployment

A. Aliya vs political stability, 1996–2020

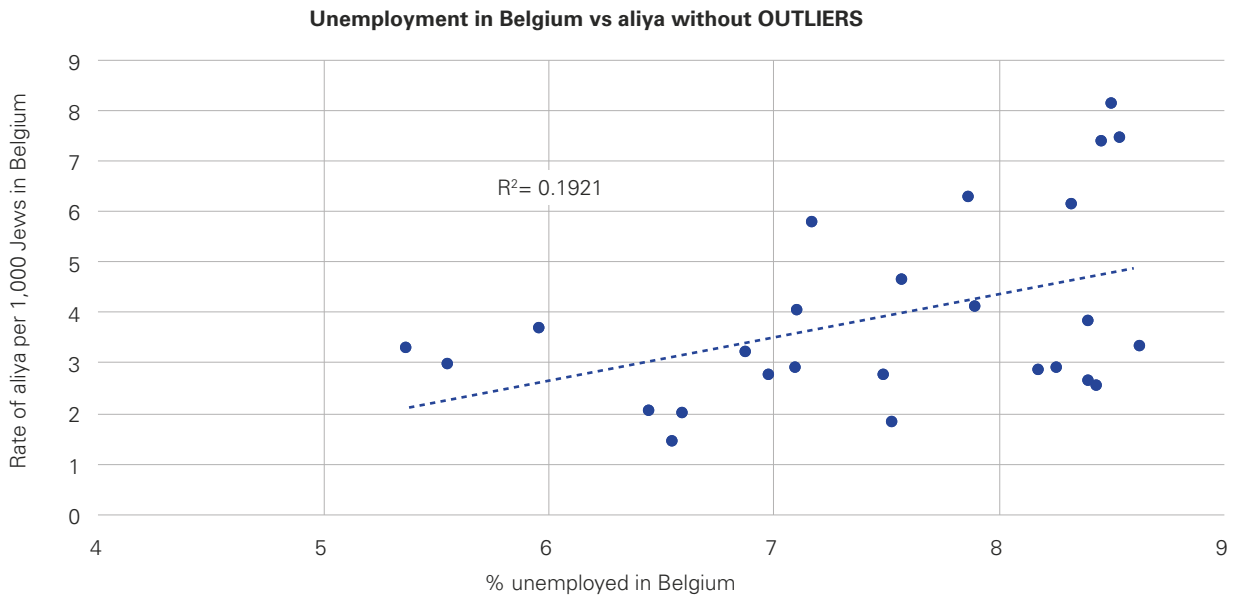


Source: (1) Daniel Kaufmann, Natural Resource Governance Institute (NRGI) and Brookings, Aart Kraay, World Bank, Development Economics, WGI 2020 Interactive > Home (worldbank.org); (2) Central Bureau of Statistics-Israel.

B. Aliya vs unemployment in Belgium, 1990–2020

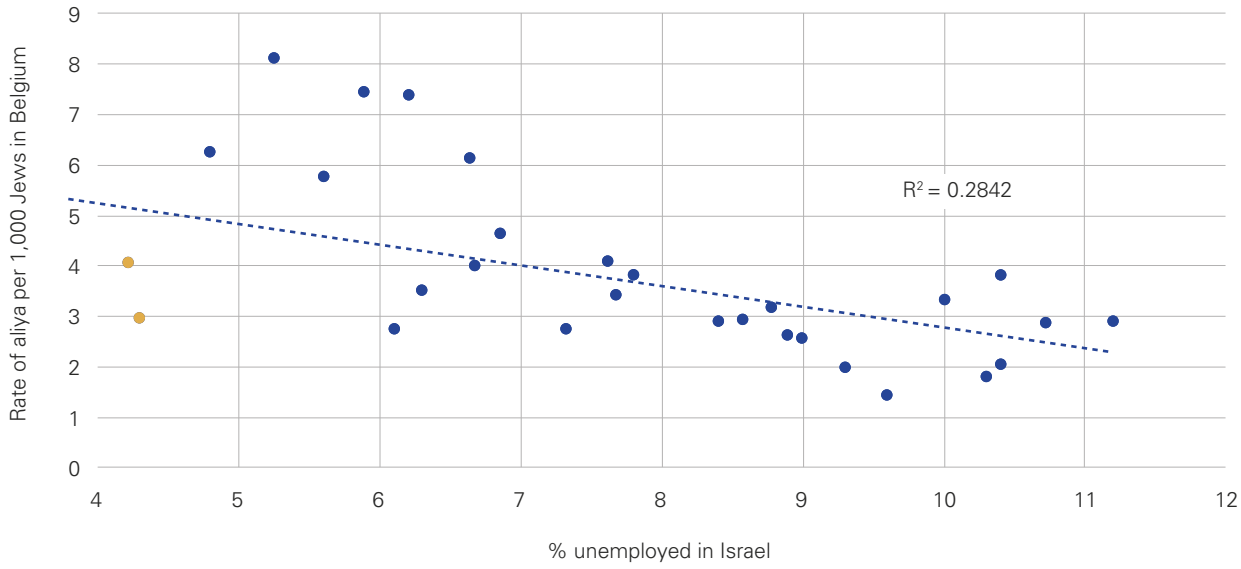


Note: outliers, e.g. years of especially high unemployment unaccompanied by years of high aliya, are shown in yellow. % of explained variance in the rate of aliya is about 8% in linear trendline and about 21% in the order 3 polynomial.
Source: (1) OECD. 2021. Unemployment rate (indicator). doi: 10.1787/52570002-en; (2) Central Bureau of Statistics-Israel and authors' calculations of the population size of Jews in Belgium.



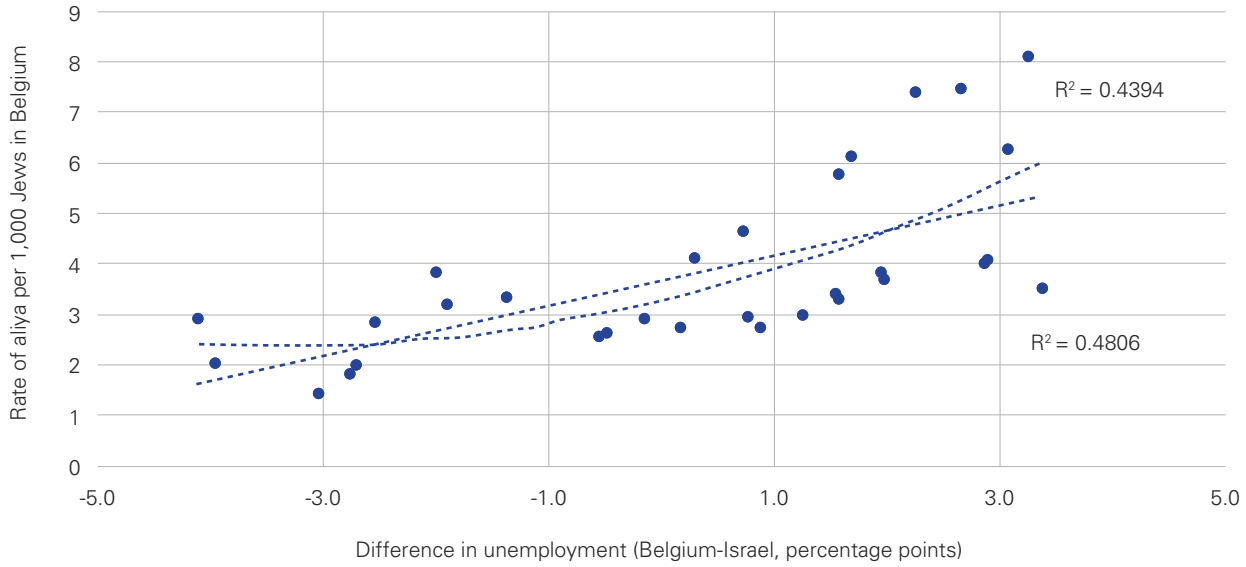
Note: outliers have been removed which resulted in an increase in the proportion of explained variance increased in a linear model.
Source: (1) OECD. 2021. Unemployment rate (indicator). doi: 10.1787/52570002-en; (2) Central Bureau of Statistics-Israel and authors' calculations of the population size of Jews in Belgium.

C. Aliya vs unemployment in Israel, 1990–2020



Source: Central Bureau of Statistics-Israel and authors' calculations of the population size of Jews in Belgium.

D. Aliya vs difference in unemployment between Belgium and Israel, 1990–2020



Note: % of explained variance in the rate of aliya is about 48% in linear trendline and about 44% in the order 2 polynomial.
Source: (1) OECD. 2021. Unemployment rate (indicator). doi: 10.1787/52570002-en; (2) Central Bureau of Statistics-Israel and authors' calculations of the population size of Jews in Belgium.

/ Methodological annex: estimates of the size of the Jewish population in Belgium and its components of growth

Section 1. Estimates of the size of the Jewish population in Belgium

An overview of sources

There has been considerable uncertainty aboutthe size of the Jewish population in Belgium for many years. Currently, the 'accuracy rating' of the Belgian Jewish population estimate in the 'World Jewish population' chapter of the *American Jewish Year Book* is 'C', on a scale running from A (high accuracy) to D (low), and as it states there, the "base estimate [is] derived from less recent sources and/or less reliable or partial coverage of country's Jewish population" and has been "updated on the basis of demographic information illustrative of regional demographic trends."[67] The accuracy assessment in the recent JPR report on European Jewish demography ('Jews in Europe at the turn of the millennium') is identical. Level 'C' accuracy is only one grade better than 'D' estimates, which are characterised as speculative. The work reported here represents an attempt to improve the situation.

In the absence of a national census including questions on religion and/or ethnicity and allowing for Jews to identify as such, the task of estimating the size of the Jewish population is difficult. However, recently, due to new developments with respect to data availability, we have been able to reconsider the question in the Belgian case.

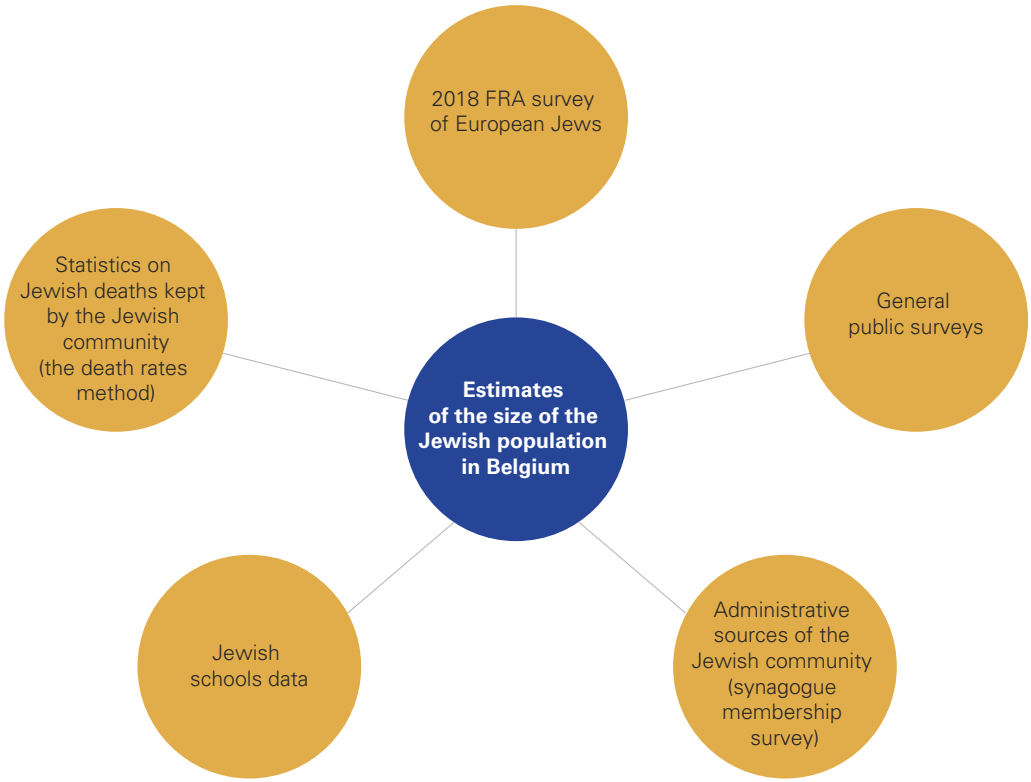
Several developments are noteworthy. First, a number of national and international surveys conducted across Europe in recent years have included a question on religion – for example, the European Social Survey and the European Values Study. This is due both to an increase in interest in ethnic and religious diversity, and, in certain instances, a need to compensate for the removal of the question on religion from some population censuses (e.g. in Austria, the Netherlands, and Switzerland), following a switch from traditional to register-based censuses. It must be noted that national sample sizes produced by these surveys are often not adequate to estimate accurately such a small minority as the Jews.

Second, the coronavirus pandemic prompted the European Jewish Demography Unit at JPR to undertake extensive work on the impact of coronavirus mortality on Jews in Europe. As part of this project, data on deaths were collected across European Jewish communities including Belgium. While the substantive findings regarding the level of the impact of coronavirus is not our focus here,[68] the information on the number of deaths can be used to estimate population size. The number of deaths gives a strong signal regarding the number of living people. In the

67 DellaPergola, S. 2020. World Jewish population, 2019. *American Jewish Year Book* 2019. Cham: Springer, pp. 334–335. DellaPergola, S., Staetsky, L.D. 2020. *Jews in Europe at the turn of the millennium: population trends and estimates*. European Jewish Demography Unit/JPR Report, pp. 68–70.

68 The substantive findings on this subject can be found in: Staetsky, L.D. and Paltiel, A. 2020. *COVID-19 mortality and Jews: global overview of the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic, March to May 2020*. European Jewish Demography Unit/JPR.

Figure 1A. The Jewish population in Belgium circa 2020: sources of estimation



past, the so-called 'death rate method' (which is essentially a reconstruction of the population size on the basis of the number of observed deaths, with some assumptions regarding the force of mortality and/or age structure) was used in many instances to estimate the size of the Jewish population in the absence of other options.[69]

Third, in spring 2021 the European Jewish Demography Unit conducted a synagogue membership survey of Belgium. The survey was modelled on the British synagogue membership survey.[70] Two lists of Belgian synagogues were obtained from the major Belgian Jewish community institutions, and we contacted all listed synagogues/communities asking for the number of households paying a membership fee to that synagogue who are, to the best of their knowledge, not members of any other synagogue. We used these numbers, coupled with some assumptions about household size, to estimate the number of Jews affiliated to synagogues/Jewish communities in Belgium.

Finally, Belgium has a well-developed system of faith education, and the educational authorities there maintain detailed records of the number of children in faith schools, including Jewish schools, by age/educational stage. Knowing the number of children in particular age groups allows for the

69 For examples of such application, see: (1) Haberman, S., Kosmin, B. and Levy, C. 1983. Mortality patterns of British Jews 1975–79: insights and applications for the size and structure of British Jewry, *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, Series A (General), 146 (3): 294–310. (2) Prais, S.J. and Schmool, M. 1968. The size and structure of the Anglo-Jewish population 1960–1965, *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 10: 5–34. (3) Kantorowitsch, M. 1936. Estimate of the Jewish population of London, 1929–1933, *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 99: 372–379. (4) Trachtenber, H. L. 1933. Estimate of the Jewish population of London in 1929, *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 96: 87–98. (5) Rosenbaum, S. 1905. A contribution to the study of vital and other statistics of the Jews in the United Kingdom, *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 68: 526–556.

70 See, for example: Casale Mashiah, D. and Boyd, D. 2017. *Synagogue membership in the United Kingdom in 2016*. Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

reconstruction of the entire population size, using certain assumptions about the age distribution of a given population. In past research, good quality records of school enrolment have been instrumental in helping to correct for deficient population census records.[71]

In addition to these sources, we have also used the Belgian sample from the 2018 survey of the perceptions and experiences of antisemitism among Jews conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), referred to here as the 2018 FRA survey. Alongside questions relating to the perceptions and experiences of antisemitism, the 2018 FRA survey included many questions on Jewish socio-demographic characteristics and Jewish identity. This information informs various assumptions made while working with other data sources, e.g. about the average household size, the scope of synagogue affiliation, or the uptake of Jewish schools among Jews in Belgium. Figure 1A contains a schematic representation of the main sources used for the estimation of the population size of Jews in Belgium.

The 2018 FRA survey: methodological information

JPR worked in partnership with Ipsos MORI to undertake the 2018 FRA survey of Jews, with the key responsibility for managing the data collection process and assessing the quality of the survey post-fieldwork. It was the second survey of this kind; the first one was carried out in 2012. In addition to issues related to antisemitism, the survey collected a vast array of information about the sociodemographic characteristics of Jews and their Jewish identity. In this report we present these data, describing the Belgian Jewish community in unprecedented detail. We also utilise these data to calibrate other sources of sociodemographic information about the Belgian Jewish community.

The 2018 survey was an opt-in online survey that ran over a period of seven weeks in May–June 2018. The online questionnaire accommodated several delivery modes: laptop, computer, tablet and smartphone. Eligible participants were all Jews by self-definition, aged 16 or over, and resident in one of the survey countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the UK. The questionnaire could be accessed via an open web link that was publicised through extensive advertising by Jewish organisations, media outlets and social networks, across the entire spectrum of religious lifestyles. Participants reached in this way were then encouraged to share the link to access the survey with other Jews known to them, e.g. acquaintances, friends and colleagues. Thus, the resultant sample of 785 Belgian Jewish respondents is a convenience sample.

In Europe today, probability sampling of Jews is not possible. There are several reasons for this. First, Jews are a rare population: they comprise about 0.2% of the total population in Europe. Even in France, home to the largest Jewish population in Europe, they still comprise less than 1% of the total population in that country.[72] For comparison: in the USA Jews comprise about 2% of the total population.[73] In Europe, only in the regions of Ile de France and London do Jewish populations approach the American share. In practical terms, this means that sample surveys of European populations, with typical sizes in the range of 1,000–5,000 respondents, simply cannot generate usable samples of Jews, and that pre-screening populations for Jews is prohibitively expensive and impractical in European national populations. Further, sampling frameworks necessary for probability sampling do not exist or are inaccessible in Europe; alternative methods developed for rare populations, such

71 See: (1) Anderson, B. and Silver, B. 1985. 'Estimating census undercount from school enrolment data: and application to the Soviet censuses of 1959 and 1970,' *Demography* 22 (2): 289–308, and (2) Staetsky, L. D. and Boyd, J. 2016. *The rise and rise of Jewish schools in the United Kingdom: numbers, trends and policy issues*. Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

72 Source: DellaPergola, S. and Staetsky, L.D. 2021. *Jews in Europe at the turn of the millennium: population trends and estimates*. European Jewish Demography Unit/JPR.

73 Pew Research Center. 2021. *Jewish Americans in 2020*.

as respondent driven sampling, have so far failed to bring results.[74]

Given the nature of the sample used in FRA 2018, it is critical that its reliability is properly understood. The extent to which the Belgian Jewish sample is representative of the Belgian Jewish population cannot be exactly determined, yet we consider it sufficiently reliable as a source of information about the Jewish identity of Belgian Jews on the basis of the following considerations, and with the following qualifications:

1. Past experience teaches us that convenience samples of the kind produced by the 2018 FRA survey are somewhat selective; they tend to underrepresent both very assimilated and unaffiliated Jews and strictly Orthodox Jews, for two different reasons. The very assimilated and unaffiliated may not be reachable for a survey distributed by Jewish organisations, and even for the referral chains starting in such organisations, because they are simply too distant from Jewish life. By contrast, the strictly Orthodox are reachable through community channels but, as a rule, have a weaker online presence than others. Both groups were under-represented in the FRA survey in several countries with well-documented patterns of Jewish affiliation and religious makeup (e.g. Austria, France, Poland, the UK), although in others with strongly centralised systems of community membership (e.g. Italy and Germany), correspondence to benchmarks was considerably better. However, importantly, because the composition of all country-specific European Jewish samples could be compared to sociodemographic benchmarks of the Jewish populations, specifically with respect to sex, age and Jewish identity, weights could be developed to redress the sample. All analysis in this report utilising the 2018 FRA survey uses weights to ensure its better alignment with Jewish population characteristics.

2. It should be noted that, whenever such tests have been carried out, the weighted and unweighted results on Jewish identity characteristics proved to be rather close to each other. In some instances, adjustment with weights tended to reduce the proportion of Jews observing various religious practices. Yet, such adjustment did not result in a radical modification of the picture of observance. For example, with respect to the level of regular attendance at a Passover seder, the unweighted figure for Europe as a whole (all countries covered by the 2018 FRA survey) is 80%, while applying compositional weights reduces the level of attendance to 74%. Concerning regular fasting on Yom Kippur, the respective figures are 70% and 62%. The differences with respect to other practices (lighting candles on Friday night, eating kosher at home) are on an even smaller scale.[75] Nevertheless, even after weighting, the sample may be overstating the levels of ritual observance and some other measures relating to involvement in Jewish life due to a still undercounted presence of the most assimilated and unaffiliated Jews. On the basis of our previous work, we suggest that the readers bear in mind the possibility of such an overstatement by about 10%, at the level of the whole sample.[76] However, such an overstatement does not apply when examining the results by subgroups of the Jewish population defined by levels of religiosity and observance (e.g. Orthodox, Reform/Progressive, Traditional) – the recorded results are considerably less affected by such overestimation, if at all. The overestimation at the level of the whole sample stems from the compositional effect, i.e. the depressed presence of the most assimilated/unaffiliated.

3. The main Belgian Jewish organisations involved in distributing the survey to their members/affiliates/subscribers were: the Coordinating Committee of Jewish

74 For detailed discussion of the methodologies and solutions used in European surveys of Jews see: Staetsky, L.D. 2019. Can convenience samples be trusted? Lessons from the survey of Jews in Europe, 2012. *Contemporary Jewry* 39: 115–153.

75 These and other comparisons are shown in DellaPergola, S. and Staetsky, L.D. 2021. *Jewish identities of European Jews: what, why and how*. European Jewish Demography Unit/JPR.

76 Comparisons of weighted and unweighted results of the 2012 FRA sample to the benchmarks are shown in: Staetsky, L.D. 2019. Can convenience samples be trusted? Lessons from the survey of Jews in Europe, 2012. *Contemporary Jewry* 39: 115–153.

Organisations in Belgium (Brussels); Centre Communautaire Laïc Juif (Brussels); 'Regards' – a Jewish French-speaking magazine (Brussels); the European Union of Jewish Students (Brussels); the Belgian Union of Jewish Students (Brussels); La Centrale – (the Jewish Central Welfare Organisation in Antwerp); Forum der Joodse Organisaties (Antwerp); and Machzikei Hadas (Antwerp). Several messaging services operating predominantly across the Antwerp haredi Jewish community were also involved. We estimate that across all involved organisations, invitations to participate with links to the survey were sent to about 15,000 addresses. This assessment is based on estimates made by the various organisations involved of the sizes of their own databases. There is a possibility of an overlap between the email lists used by different organisations, so 15,000 represents the maximal number of persons reached; the actual number is almost certainly lower, but it cannot be estimated. 20,000 Jews in Belgium are estimated to be 16 years and over, meaning that the maximal reach of the survey could be as high as 75% of adult Belgian Jews. It would also mean that about 4% of eligible Belgian Jews responded to the 2018 FRA survey (785/20,000*100). Self-evidently, the survey reached the entire religious and social spectrum of Belgian Jews.

4. Although the organisational route of distributing the survey was dominant, it was not exclusive. Informal referrals played a significant role. 49% of the respondents (40% in Antwerp and 55% in Brussels) said that they were invited to participate in the survey by an email from an organisation or online network and 40% said that someone told them about it or sent a link (37% in Antwerp and 45% in Brussels). This testifies to the potentially significant exposure to the survey to the Jewish population beyond the 'inner' circle of those most closely involved in Jewish organisational life. We relate to the sample as a hybrid. In our view, the sample represents (a) the organised Jewish community, including the members, affiliates and subscribers to various Jewish communities, organisations and media outlets; and (b) those who are not part of the organised Jewish community but who encircle its members and affiliates at a reachable distance, and are connected to the organised community through family and other social or organisational networks.

In preparing this publication data from the publicly available FRA 2018 are used (GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA7491). The publicly available FRA 2018 dataset does not identify separate geographical locations in Belgium. All location-specific information here, in exhibits and in text, is based on the results of an independent exercise of data collection from synagogues, schools and administrative sources pertaining to Jews in Belgium. The exercise was conducted by JPR in 2021. Insights from the exercise, as reported, were then integrated into the work with the publicly available FRA 2018 dataset. That allowed the derivation of all location-specific figures.

The death rate method

Estimation of the size of the Jewish population in Antwerp

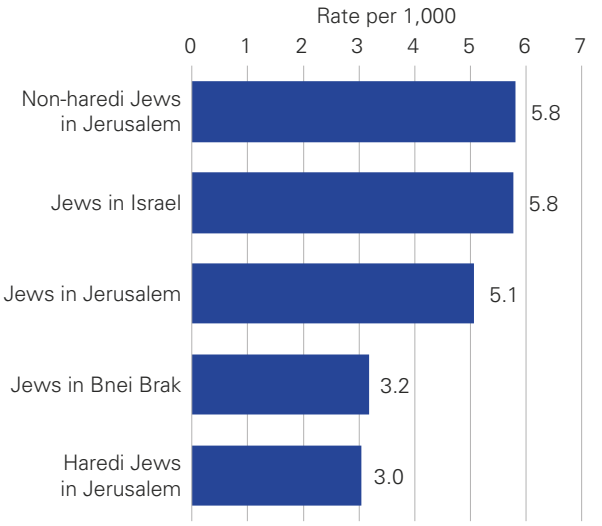
There are two Jewish burial societies operating in Antwerp: Machzikei Hadas and Shomre Hadas. The former is strictly Orthodox and the latter can best be described as mainstream Orthodox. In total, these two societies handle about 69 deaths per annum (an average of 2016–2019), with Machzikei Hadas managing 43% of these (ca. 30 deaths per annum) and Shomre Hadas managing 57% (about 40 deaths per annum). There are very few non-Orthodox Jews in Antwerp, so we can assume, for now, that these 69 deaths represent 100% of the Jewish deaths per annum in the city. Later in this section we modify this assumption and show the sensitivity of our estimates to the change.

The death rate for Jews in Antwerp can be developed using information available for the haredi and non-haredi Jewish populations of Israel, which can, in turn, be used to estimate the size of the Jewish population in the city. The crude death rate is a function of mortality (the force of death) and of the age structure.

So, the task involves identifying subpopulations of Jews in Israel that resemble Jews in Antwerp with respect to their age structure and the force of mortality. It can be assumed that the European Jewish population possesses mortality schedules similar to those of Jews in Israel. There is a large body of literature testifying to the fact that Jewish mortality is, as a rule, lower than the mortality of non-Jews across the Diaspora. The Israeli Jewish population has one of the world's lowest mortality rates.[77] So this is a rather safe assumption and we will be applying it throughout this section. But what of the age structure and the interaction of the age structure and mortality expressed in the crude death rate?

The Israeli Jewish population, which is younger than a typical European population, possesses a crude death rate of around 5.8 per 1,000 (Figure 2A) – i.e. 5.8 people in every 1,000 in the total Israeli Jewish population die per annum. However, Bnei Brak, a city that is almost exclusively strictly Orthodox, has a crude death rate of 3.2 per 1,000. The haredi neighbourhoods of Jerusalem are easily identifiable and the death rate in these places is very close to the death rate observed in Bnei Brak. The remaining non-haredi Jewish population of Jerusalem, with its still significant Orthodox as well as Jewish Traditional components, has a crude death rate of 5.8 per 1,000. We maintain that the age structure of the Antwerp haredi and non-haredi populations are sufficiently close to the Israeli haredi and Israeli Traditional populations, respectively. This is supported by the observation that the average size of the haredi household in Israel is around 5, which is very similar to the average household size found for haredi Jews in Antwerp in the FRA 2018 dataset.[78]

Figure 2A. Crude death rate per 1,000 in selected populations in Israel, average 2016–2019



Note: The haredi neighbourhoods of Jerusalem are Ramat Shlomo, Ramot Alon Tzafon, Har Hahotzvim, Sanhedrya, Ramat Eshkol, Givat Hamivtar, Geula, Mea Shearim, Romema, Har Nof. These neighbourhoods have the highest level of homogeneity with respect to their composition, i.e. they are almost exclusively haredi, according to the estimates published by the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research (Statistical Yearbook of Jerusalem 2019, Table III/20).
Source: The figures have either been adopted from or calculated on the basis of the following sources: (1) Central Bureau of Statistics, Israel. *Statistical Abstract of Israel* 69, 70, 71, Tables 3.27, 3.8 and 3.8, respectively; (2) Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research. *Statistical Yearbook of Jerusalem* 2018–2020, Tables III/8 and IV/6; (3) data received on request from the Central Bureau of Statistics Israel; (4) Central Bureau of Statistics, Israel. Kovetz Yishuvim.

Thus, our decision is to adopt: (1) the middle value of the crude death rate of the haredi populations of Bnei Brak and Jerusalem, which is 3.1 per 1,000, for estimating the crude death rate for the strictly Orthodox Jewish population in Antwerp; and (2) the death rate of the non-haredi population of Jerusalem (5.8 per 1,000) for estimating the non-haredi Jewish population in Antwerp.

77 For a detailed presentation of this issue consult the following, and references therein: (1) Staetsky, L.D. and Hinde, A. 2015. 'Jewish mortality reconsidered,' *Journal of Biosocial Science* 47 (3), pp. 376–401; (2) Staetsky, L.D., Hinde, A. 2009. 'Unusually small sex differentials in mortality of Israeli Jews: what does the structure of causes of deaths tells us?' *Demographic Research* 20 (11): 209–252; (3) Staetsky, L. 2011. 'The role of smoking in the explanation of the Israeli Jewish pattern of sex differentials in mortality,' *Population Studies* 65 (2): 231–244; (4) Staetsky, L. 2011. 'Mortality of British Jews at the turn of the 20th century in a comparative perspective,' *European Journal of Population* 27(3): 361–385. For an historical overview, see DellaPergola, S. 1989. Changing Patterns of Jewish Demography in the Modern World. *Studia Rosenthaliana, The Netherlands and Jewish Migration; The Problem of Migration and Jewish Identity*, special issue published together with 23, 2, 154–174.

78 The source of the Israeli figure: Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research. *Statistical Yearbook of Jerusalem* 2020, Table III/19. See below for more information on the average household size.

Assuming the death rate of 3.1 per 1,000 for the strictly Orthodox component of the Jewish population of Antwerp, we can estimate the size of this component at 9,677 (30/3.1*1,000). It follows that the size of the non-strictly Orthodox Jewish population is 6,724 (39/5.8*1,000). Therefore, in total, about **16,000** Jews live in Antwerp (the exact number is 16,401, but we will use the rounded number for convenience).

The crude death rate for the Jewish population of Antwerp as a whole (essentially a young low-mortality population in demographic terms, and a strongly traditional population with a significant strictly Orthodox component in Jewish terms) should be about half of the crude mortality rate in Belgium (around 10,000). We estimate the crude death rate of Jews in Antwerp as 4.1 per 1,000 but this is a side issue in this context.

A small proportion of the Jewish population of Antwerp may be completely detached from any Jewish communal framework, with the consequence that the deaths in this population may be handled outside the Jewish burial society system. In fact, the FRA 2018 survey and a synagogue membership survey of Belgium indicate 8.5% of non-haredi Jews in Antwerp do not belong to *any* Jewish framework, not even a Jewish club of a non-religious character. Accounting for this brings the non-haredi component of Antwerp to 7,349 (6,724*100/91.5). As a result of this adjustment, the total Jewish population of Antwerp can be calculated as: 9,677 haredi and 7,349 non-haredi, equalling 17,026 (rounded to **17,000**).

Estimation of the size of the Jewish population in Brussels and other areas of Belgium

There are three main Jewish burial societies operating in Brussels, two of which can be described as mainstream Orthodox with the third belonging to Liberal Judaism. The annual number of deaths handled by all three societies is about 86 (an average of 2016–2019). According to the FRA 2018 survey and a synagogue membership survey of Belgium, about 25% of Jews in Brussels do not belong to *any* Jewish framework, not even a cultural club with no religious character. Applying this proportion, the total number of Jewish deaths in Brussels can be estimated at 115 (86*100/75).

What can be reasonably assumed about the death rate of this population? Most Jews in Brussels and other areas outside Antwerp self-identify as just Jewish, Traditional or Reform/Progressive. Their household size (in the FRA 2018 dataset) resembles the household size of the non-haredi population in the United Kingdom. Age profiles of the non-haredi respondents to the FRA 2018 survey in UK and in Brussels are also broadly similar. Given these findings, it would be reasonable to assume that their age structure is close to the age structure of non-haredi British Jews. As previously discussed, we can make the same assumption about the force of mortality. It is plausible that the crude death rate of Jews and Brussels (and areas outside Antwerp), which is a function of the force of mortality and the age structure, resembles the death rate of non-haredi Jews in the United Kingdom.

The crude death rate of non-haredi British Jews can be estimated at about 9.5 per 1,000. This is a function of the population size of about 240,000 (271,259–31,000 identifiable strictly Orthodox) and the annual number of 2,330 deaths (2,450 deaths in total minus 120 estimated strictly Orthodox deaths).[79] Applying this crude death rate to the original number of deaths in Brussels (86) gives a population size of about **9,000** (86/9.5*1000=9,052, rounded). If, on the other hand, we apply it to the revised number of deaths pushed up by accounting

79 See: (1) for the number of British haredi and non-haredi Jews in 2011: Staetsky, D. L. and Boyd, J. 2015. *Strictly Orthodox Rising: what the demography of British Jews tells us about the future of the community*. London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research, and (2) for the number of annual deaths in the British Jewish community in 2011: Casale Mashiah, D. 2018. *Vital statistics of the UK Jewish population: births and deaths*. London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research. The number of haredi Jewish deaths is estimated as 31,000*3.6/1000=124 (crude death rate in Bnei Brak was applied to the estimated haredi population in the UK). The estimate of the British haredi population contained in Staetsky and Boyd (2015) has now been superseded (see Staetsky, L.D. 2022. *Haredi Jews around the world: population trends and estimates*. London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research). The considerations above are unaffected by this revision.

for a possible undercount of deaths of those Jews detached from communal life (115), then we would arrive at a population size of about **12,000** (115/9.5*1,000=12,105, rounded).

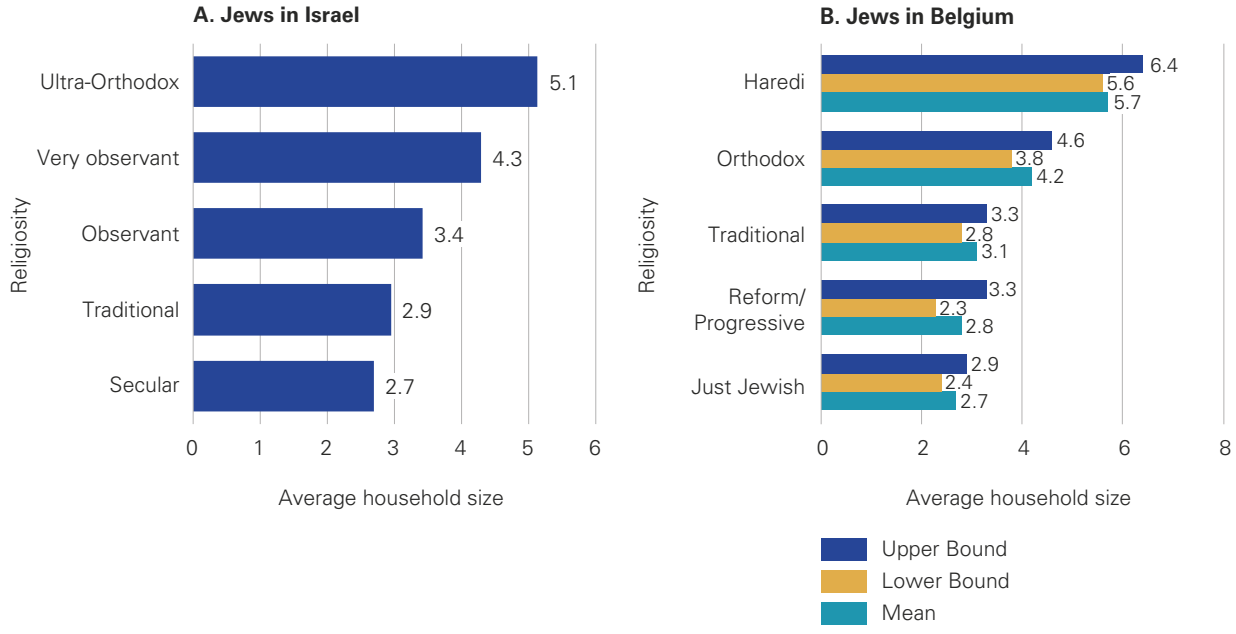
Based on these insights, it is now possible to estimate the size of the Jewish population outside Antwerp and Brussels. According to the FRA 2018 survey and a synagogue membership survey of Belgium, the relationship between the numbers of Jews living in Brussels, on the one hand, and the numbers living in areas outside of Brussels and outside of Antwerp, on the other hand is 88:12. Therefore, the estimated size of the Jewish population outside Antwerp (Brussels and all other areas) is between 10,000 (9,000*100/88=10,227, rounded) and 14,000 (12,000*100/88=13,636).

Thus, the death rate method leads to the conclusion that the total Jewish population in Belgium is in the range of 27,000–31,000: about 17,000 in Antwerp, 9,000–12,000 in Brussels, and 1,000–2,000 elsewhere.

Administrative sources of the Jewish community

In terms of Jewish religiosity and traditionalism, Brussels and Antwerp are two very different worlds. An absolute majority of Jews in Antwerp are affiliated to a synagogue and/or one of the two communal bodies – Machzikei Hadas and Shomre Hadas – both of which maintain records of membership. In Antwerp the proportion of respondents unaffiliated to any Jewish organisation is negligible (below 5%), while in Brussels and the surrounding areas it is about 26%. Also, Brussels does not possess a central body with an official membership structure, like Machzikei Hadas and Shomre Hadas in Antwerp. In view of this, we approached the task of administrative data collection in these communities in two different ways. In Antwerp, we approached the two communal bodies directly for membership information. In Brussels, we conducted a census of all existing synagogues and Jewish religious communities.

Figure 3A. Average persons per household, Jewish population of Israel and Belgium, 2018



Note: For Jews in Belgium 95% confidence intervals are shown. For Jews in Israel the data come from the large-scale survey and confidence intervals are very narrow making their presentation unnecessary.
Source: Israel: *Statistical Yearbook of Jerusalem*, 2020, Table III/19. Belgium: FRA survey sample.

The basic unit of information in administrative records is a household/family, not an individual. To obtain the population figures (i.e. the number of individuals) household counts need to be multiplied by the appropriate average household sizes. Two sources that may give us some idea of the latter are: (1) the Israeli Labour Force Survey that regularly collects data on household size and religiosity; and (2) the Belgian FRA sample. Both sources (Figure 3A) paint quite similar pictures of household sizes. In our estimates of Jewish population, we mostly use average household sizes from Israel as they are derived from a much larger sample and, as a result, are more certain. Experimentally, we would also use British Jewish average household sizes (in the context of Brussels), to test the sensitivity of our estimates to assumptions regarding this metric.

Antwerp

The communal membership records of the Machzikei Hadas and Shomre Hadas communities indicate the presence of 3,400 households (mid-May 2021). Average household sizes of the Jewish populations represented by these communities are 5.0 and 3.7, respectively.[80] The application of the average household sizes to the documented household counts renders a population estimate for the city of about **15,000** Jews.

As an aside, it is worth noting that a commercial directory of the observant Jewish community of Antwerp ('Community Connections' 2017), encompassing various Jewish communities under the umbrella of both Machzikei Hadas and Shomre Hadas, lists about 2,300 households. The exact nature of inclusions and exclusions from the directory is unknown. Directories of this kind tend to include people who may have left the community (through immigration) and to omit people who do not wish to be listed. The omissions may be greater than the lingering erroneous inclusions – members of the Antwerp Jewish community whom we consulted indicated that the commercial directory has partial coverage, in their view. Taking the number of households appearing in the directory at face value and assuming the same proportionate representation of the Machzikei Hadas and Shomre Hadas as in the official communal records, we are led to the conclusion that the total number of individuals across these communities is around 10,200. Given the time reference of the directory (years 2016/17) and the likely undercount, it is reasonable to relate to 10,000 as the lowest possible boundary for the number of people across both communities.

Brussels

In March–April 2021, the authors conducted a census of synagogues in Brussels, asking administrators of all known synagogues for: (1) official membership counts, i.e. numbers of fee-paying members; and (2) a characterisation of their communities on the spectrum of religiosity and denominational alignment. The latter was necessary in order to establish the appropriate average household size – to be used to convert the counts of households into individual counts. Lists of synagogues and religious communities were submitted to the authors by two Belgian Jewish communal figures.

All Brussels communities featuring on the lists were approached for information (11 in total): Foyer Sepharad, Chaarei Tzion (Sephardi), Congrégation Israélite Sépharade d'Uccle-Forest/ CISU (Sephardi), Maale, The Great Synagogue/ La Régence, Beth Hillel (Liberal), International Jewish Centre (Liberal), Chabad-Brussels, Chabad EU-Brussels, Mahzikei Hadas Brussels, Synagogue Beth Israel. All but one provided the data.

80 These are derived from the average household size of Israeli Jews by religiosity: ultra-Orthodox and observant/very observant, corresponding to the nature of Mahzikei Hadas and Shomre Hadas, respectively. Source: Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research. *Statistical Yearbook of Jerusalem* 2020, Table III/19. These values are similar to the values displayed by the haredi and mainstream Orthodox/Traditional in the Belgium (FRA survey).

Summing across all communities, taking into account differential household sizes (determined on the basis of the reported degree of religiosity of each community), results in a range of **9,600–13,100** Jews in Brussels.

The authors did not manage to procure data from communities outside Brussels and Antwerp. It is possible to estimate the approximate size of this population by using the relationship between (a) Brussels and (b) areas outside Brussels and outside Antwerp from the FRA survey as before (88:12). Thus, the total Jewish population in Brussels and areas outside of Brussels and Antwerp is in the range of 10,900 (9,600*100/88) and 14,900 (13,100*100/88). Thus, the number of Jews outside of Brussels and Antwerp lies in a range of 1,300–1,800.

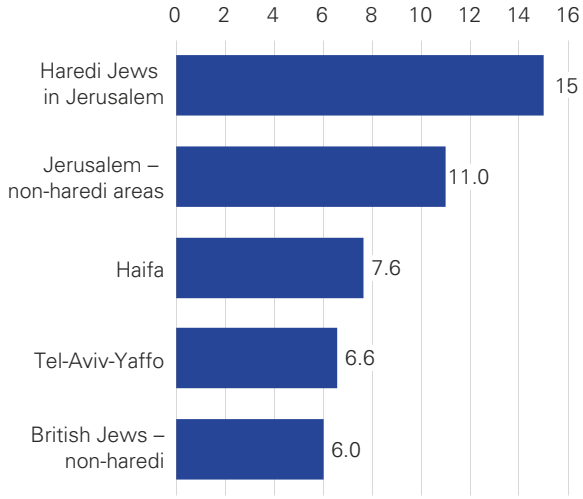
In sum, an examination of the administrative records of the Jewish community leads to the conclusion that the total Jewish population in Belgium is in the range of 26,000–30,000: about 15,000 in Antwerp, 10,000–13,000 in Brussels, and 1,000–2,000 elsewhere.

Jewish schools data

Antwerp

According to the records of the Ministry of Education of the Flemish community of Belgium, there were 202 students at a primary level of schooling (ages 6–11 years) in two non-haredi Jewish schools in Antwerp, Yavne and Tachkemoni, around 2020. The FRA 2018 survey and other sources at our disposal indicate that 15% of non-haredi Jews in Antwerp send children to non-Jewish schools. It follows that the total number of children aged 6–11 years among non-haredi Jews is 238 (202*100/85). The figure for the Antwerp non-haredi rate of uptake on non-Jewish schools is based on a rather small number of cases (65). As a precaution, we also take into consideration the Brussels non-haredi uptake of non-Jewish schools (35%). Using this rate leads to the conclusion that the total number of children aged 6–11 years among non-haredi Jews in Antwerp is 311 (202*100/65).

Figure 4A. % of 6–11 years old out of total Jewish population in different locations, early 21st century



Note: The haredi neighbourhoods of Jerusalem are Ramat Shlomo, Ramot Alon Tzafon, Har Hahotzvim, Sanhedrya, Ramat Eshkol, Givat Hamivtar, Geula, Mea Shearim, Romema, Har Nof. These neighbourhoods have the highest level of homogeneity with respect to their composition, i.e. they are almost exclusively haredi, according to the estimates published by the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research. The Jewish population of the non-haredi areas has been calculated as the difference between the total population and the population of the haredi areas.
The haredi neighbourhoods in England and Wales are London-Hackney (wards of Brownswood, Cazenove, Lordship, New River, and Springfield only), London-Haringey (ward of Seven Sisters), as well as three local authorities outside of London: Bury (ward of Sedgely) and Salford (wards of Broughton and Kersal), both of which are in Greater Manchester, and Gateshead.
Source: Israel: *Statistical Yearbook of Jerusalem*, 2020, Tables III/11 and III/15. United Kingdom: Office for National Statistics, 2011 Census Table DC2107EW (Nomis Official Labour Market Statistics).

On this basis, it is possible to figure out the size of the non-haredi Jewish population of Antwerp: the proportion that age group 6–11 years forms out of the total in contemporary non-haredi Jewish populations population is situated in a relatively narrow range (Figure 4A). We apply the average of the proportions observed in the mainstream Jewish population of Britain and in the non-haredi population of Jerusalem (8.5%), given that a considerable proportion of non-haredi Jewish families can be defined as national religious (i.e. non-haredi Orthodox), if expressed in terms of Israeli realities. The total number of people is then in the range of 2,800–3,700 (obtained as 238*100/8.5 and 311*100/8.5).

We estimate that there are 1,365 children aged 6–11 years across haredi schools in Antwerp. We base this estimate on the data supplied by the Ministry of Education of the Flemish community of Belgium. The Ministry's data are partial; they relate only to children educated in state-supported schools (about 1,000 in total), yet the haredi school system also includes private, non-state-supported schools. The male/female ratio of haredi children aged 6–11 years in state-supported haredi schools in Antwerp is 1:2, indicating that a significant proportion of haredi boys may be educated in a private educational system not reflected by the Ministry's records. Sex ratios at age 5 in European countries tend to be around 105 (there are 105 boys per 100 girls).[81] Using this statistic, we can correct for the number of 'missing boys' in the records; this gives a total for the number of children of both sexes of 1,365. We still suspect a certain degree of undercount of haredi children, even after implementing this correction.

6–11-year-olds comprise 15% of the total haredi population. Application of this proportion renders a total rounded number of haredi Jews in Antwerp of 9,100 (1,365*100/15).

Thus, the total number of Jews in Antwerp suggested by the school data is in the range of 11,900–12,800 (obtained as 2,800+9,100 or 3,700+9,100). This can be rounded to **12,000**.

Brussels

According to the records of the Ministry of Education of the French community of Belgium, there were 370 students at a primary level of schooling (ages 6–11 years) in two Jewish schools in Brussels in 2020. According to the FRA 2018 dataset and other sources at our disposal, 65% of parents in Brussels and the surrounding areas had children in Jewish schools. This leads to the conclusion that the total number of Jewish children in the 6–11-year-old age group is about 570 (370*100/65). Given that the sample leans towards the communally engaged, the estimate (65%) may in fact be a slight overestimate. We lack the methodology to correct it at present; it is worth bearing in mind that the actual figure may be lower and so the number of Jewish children in the 6–11-year-old age group could be higher. For example, if the real proportion of Jewish children in Jewish school is 55% (and not 65%), then the total number of Jewish children in the 6–11-year-old age group is about 672 (370*100/55). We choose not to perform such an adjustment and flag up the possibility of an undercount instead.

We apply the proportion observed in the mainstream Jewish population of Britain (6%), given the likely resemblance of its levels of fertility to the level of fertility of Jews in Brussels. This gives **9,500** (570*100/6). In line with considerations presented above the real number could also be closer to 11,200 (672*100/55).

The combined rounded number of Jews in Brussels and Antwerp, as suggested by the Jewish school data, is **21,500**. School data do not allow for an estimation of the Jewish population outside of these two locations directly. As previously, it is possible to estimate the approximate size of this population by using the relationship between (a) Brussels and (b) areas outside Brussels and outside Antwerp from the FRA survey (88:12). Thus, the total Jewish population in Brussels and areas outside of Brussels and Antwerp is in the range of 10,800 (9,500*100/88) and so the number of Jews outside of Brussels and Antwerp is about 1,300 (10,800–9,500).

This brings the total estimated number of Jews in Belgium to 22,800, rounded as 23,000, with about 12,000 in Antwerp, 9,500 in Brussels and just over 1,000 elsewhere. We have reasons to believe that both in Brussels and Antwerp there is a degree of undercount of Jewish children for reasons flagged up earlier.

81 Our World in Data, Sex ratio of five-year-olds, 2015 (ourworldindata.org).

The European Social Survey (ESS)

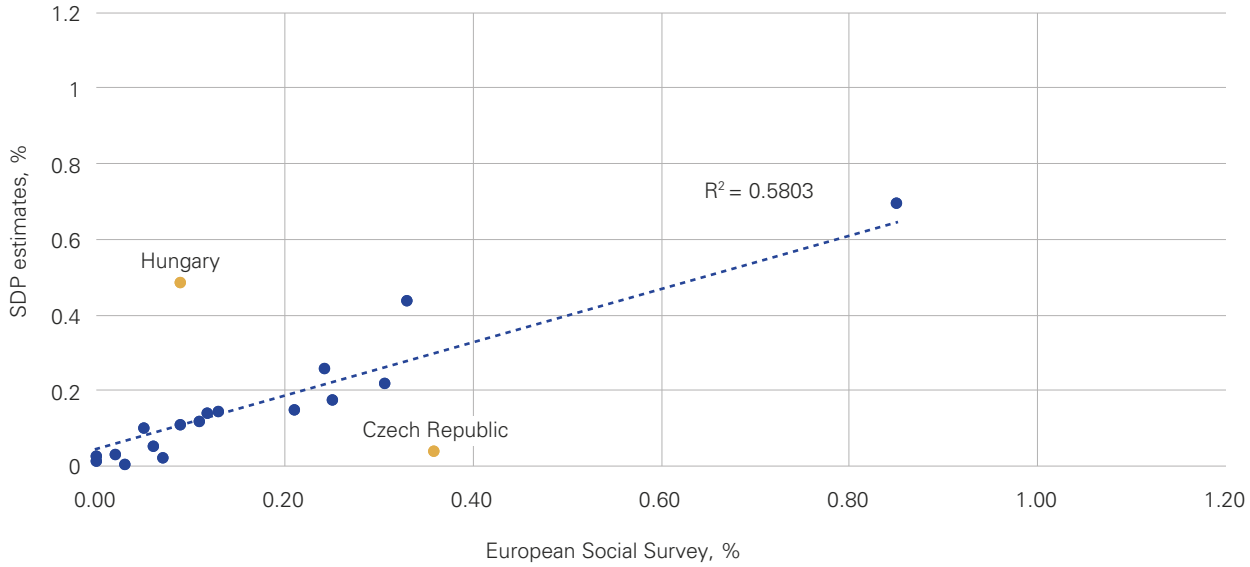
The ESS is a multi-country survey which explores the political and social attitudes of European populations. To date, the survey has covered 35 countries. It relies on random probability samples taken from European populations. In most years and places, sample sizes are situated in the range of 1,000–3,000. The ESS asks questions about the respondents' current religious belonging in two stages: first, it asks respondents if they have a religion at all; if they do, it then asks them to specify which one, with 'Jewish' as a listed option.

In Europe, Jews qualify for the status of a 'rare minority'. In the ESS studies between 2008 and 2018, an average Belgian sample of 1,800 respondents featured only 800 respondents who claimed to have a religion, of whom only 2 were Jewish, on average. In countries with a greater proportion of Jews out of the total population the situation is not substantially better: an average French sample of 1,900 with 1,000 affiliated respondents contains 10 Jews. Accumulating data from several annual samples at an analytical stage boosts the numbers considerably, in the Belgian case 14 in a sample of 10,594. Whilst this strategy still does not generate analysable samples of Jews, it does render an impression about the approximate proportion of Jews in a given population.

Let us make some assumptions. Let us assume that Belgian Jews tend to identify as people with a religion and that the segment without any religion does not contain any Jews. Under this assumption, the proportion of Jews out of the total population in Belgium in 2008–2018 is 0.15% (based on 14 cases in a sample of about 10,600). The population size of Belgium over this period (2008–18) was 11,145,000, suggesting that there are 17,000 Jews in Belgium.[82]

Let us now assume that the proportion of Jews found in the segment of the Belgian population *not* claiming any religion is exactly the same as the proportion in the segment claiming to be Jewish. On this assumption, the proportion of Jews out of the total population in Belgium in 2008–2018 is 0.34% (36 cases in a sample of 10,594). Based on this assumption, the number of Jews in Belgium according to the ESS is approximately **38,800**. The rounded average of these two extreme assumptions is **28,000**. The ESS data does not support the estimation

Figure 5A. Percentage of Jews out of total population: ESS versus SDP



82 Source: *World Population Prospects 2019*. UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Dynamics.

of particular localities inside Belgium, i.e. Brussels and Antwerp.

It is worth noting that the ESS-based estimates of the proportion of Jews out of the total population strongly correlate with the estimates produced by Sergio DellaPergola (SDP) employing conventional demographic methods (Figure 5A). The proportion of the variation in SDP's estimates explained by the ESS is 58%. Two outliers are evident: Hungary, where ESS estimates are substantially lower than the SDP estimates,[83] and the Czech Republic, where the opposite is true. While we do not possess a mature explanation of these discrepancies, removing the outliers improves the correlation of the two estimates considerably. The proportion of variation in SDP's estimates explained by the ESS following the removal of the outliers is 92%.

Putting it all together

In Table 1A below we present all estimates obtained by different methods. The lowest estimate, based on Jewish schools data, is 23,000, and, in high probability, is an underestimate. The highest estimate is 31,000. Most estimates vary in a rather narrow range of 26,000–31,000.

We note that with all methods used, the Jewish population of Antwerp today is larger than the Jewish population of Brussels. Outside of these two locations, the Jewish population is consistently found to be in the range of 1,000–2,000.

None of the estimation methods we used is perfect, and all of them have shortcomings. Nevertheless, examining them together significantly increases our confidence in estimating the size of the Belgian Jewish population. To our knowledge, both the data collection on this scale from the Belgian Jewish community and the estimation exercise of the kind presented here are the first in the history of this subject.

Table 1A. Number of Jews in Belgium under different estimation methods

Location	Method 1 (Death rate method)	Method 2 (Administrative sources)	Method 3 (Schools data)	Method 4 (the European Social Survey)
Brussels	9,000–12,000	10,000–13,000	9,500	
Antwerp	17,000	15,000	12,000	
Elsewhere	1,000–2,000	1,000–2,000	1,000	
Total	**27,000–31,000**	**26,000–30,000**	**23,000**	**28,000**

83 DellaPergola's Jewish population estimates for Hungary are significantly *lower* than other figures circulated according to other sources. See: Kovács, A. and Barna, I. 2018. *Zsidok es zsidosag magyarorszagon 2017-ben. Egy zsociologiai kutatas eredmenyei.* Budapest: Szombat.

Section 2. Components of change of the Jewish population in Belgium

Brussels: natural growth

There are two active traditional *mohelim* in Brussels today. Together, they carry out about 45 circumcisions of newborn boys per annum. Given the standard male-female ratio of 105 at birth (the ratio observed in the Western world) we estimate about 88 births per annum.

23% of all Jewish male births in the United Kingdom are not circumcised by traditional *mohelim*, though they may undergo circumcision in hospitals. A Brussels-based informant interviewed for this study suggested that some Jews in Brussels behave in a similar manner. Applying this UK proportion to the Brussels data on births results in 114 births (88*100/77).

Further, assuming that the number of Jews in Brussels is around 11,000 and assuming that their age and sex distribution resembles the distribution of the non-haredi British population, leads to the conclusion that the size of the annual birth cohort of Jews in Belgium is around 122 births. There is a good degree of correspondence between this figure and the one obtained by application of the British rate of avoidance of circumcision.

The number of Jewish deaths in Brussels is estimated to be in the range of 86–115 (see previous section).

Antwerp: natural growth

Information on the scope of circumcision in Antwerp is not available but it is possible to estimate the number of annual births there using indirect methods. The crude birth rate in the haredi populations of Jerusalem and the UK can be estimated at 33 births per 1,000. This estimation is based on the following considerations:

1. the estimated number of children aged 0–4 years living in haredi areas of Jerusalem is 23,620. Dividing this number by 5 gives the approximate size of the annual number of births as 4,724.

2. Dividing the estimated annual number of births by population size in haredi areas of Jerusalem (149,729) results in an estimated crude rate of 32 per 1,000.[84]

About 10,000 haredi Jews are estimated to have been resident in Antwerp around the year 2020 (see previous section for estimation), thus the annual number of births is expected to approach 330.

Table 2A. Components of natural growth of Jews in Brussels and Antwerp, around 2020

Location	Annual births	Annual deaths	Balance of births and deaths	Annual rate of natural increase, per 1,000
Brussels Jews	88–122	86–115	Near zero	Near 0
Antwerp Jews	430	70	360	23
Total Jews				12
Belgium as a whole				0.7–1.5
Jews in Israel				14

Note: the annual rate of natural growth is calculated by dividing the balance of births and deaths by the estimated population (expressed per 1,000).
Source: data for Belgium as a whole come from: Eurostat. 2021. *Population change-demographic balance and crude rates at national level*, DEMO-GIND, these data relate to years 2013–2019; year 2020 was a year of negative natural growth in Belgium. Data for Israeli Jews are from: Central Bureau of Statistics, Israel. *Statistical Abstract of Israel* 2020, Table 2.12.

84 The source of the figures: *Statistical Yearbook of Jerusalem*, 2020, Table III/15. The data for the British haredi population signal a crude birth rate of 34 per 1,000 (Office for National Statistics, 2011 Census Table DC2107EW (Nomis Official Labour Market Statistics). See previous section for definitions of haredi areas in Jerusalem and the United Kingdom.

The crude birth rate of the non-haredi population in Antwerp is estimated in the following manner:

1. the estimated number of children aged 0–4 years living in non-haredi areas of Jerusalem is 49,160. Dividing this number by 5 gives the approximate size of the annual number of births as 9,832.

2. Dividing the estimated annual number of births by population size in non-haredi areas of Jerusalem (420,150) results in an estimated crude rate of 22 per 1,000.

3. A similar procedure applied to the mainstream British Jewish population results in an estimated crude rate of 11 per 1,000.

4. The average value of these two estimates is 17 per 1,000.[85]

About 6,000 non-haredi Jews are estimated to have been resident in Antwerp around the year 2020, thus the annual number of births is about 102.

Together, the haredi and non-haredi Jewish populations in Antwerp have about 430 (rounded) births per annum.

The number of Jewish deaths in Antwerp is estimated to be around 70 (see previous section).

To sum up, around the year 2020 the rate of natural increase of Belgian Jews was very high (12 per 1,000). In high probability, this was almost exclusively due to the Orthodox and strictly Orthodox population in Antwerp. The Jewish population of Brussels seemed to be stagnating. This rate of natural increase is much higher than the corresponding rate for Belgium as a whole (in the range of 0.7–1.5 per 1,000 in 2013–2019) and somewhat lower than among Jews in Israel (about 14 per 1,000).

Indicators of fertility and mortality of Jews in Brussels and Antwerp

We estimate that the total fertility rate (TFR) of Jews in Brussels stands at about 1.77 children per woman around the year 2020. This is about 10% higher than in the population of Belgium as a whole (1.61).[86] Our estimate is derived indirectly using the Child-Woman Ratio method (CWR method).

$TFR^{J}=TFR^{ALL} * (CWR^{J} /CWR^{ALL})$, where TFR^{J} is the TFR of the Jewish population, TFR^{ALL} is the TFR of the total population of a given country (in this case, Belgium) and CWR^{J} and CWR^{ALL} are Child-Woman Ratio of Jews and the total population, respectively. CWR of Jews in Brussels ($CWR^{J}=0.27$) is a ratio of the number of children aged 0–4 years and the number of women of reproductive ages (those aged 15–49 years), assuming that the age and sex distribution of Brussels' Jews resembles the distribution of the non-haredi British population. CWR of the total population in Belgium ($CWR^{ALL}=0.24$) is a ratio of the number of children aged 0–4 years and the number of women of reproductive ages (those aged 15–49 years) in Belgium as a whole. Jewish TFR in Brussels is calculated as: 1.6*(0.27/0.24) = 1.77.[87]

Applying age-specific birth rates corresponding to TFR 1.77 to the age distribution of Jewish women in Brussels (assumed to resemble the age and sex distribution of the non-haredi British population) returns 118 births – a figure situated in the range of 114–122 annual births, obtained by independent methods.[88]

The haredi populations across the globe are rather similar in lifestyle and levels of fertility.

85 The sources are identical to those used for estimation of the crude birth rate of the haredi.

86 Source of TFR for Belgium as a whole: StatBel, A still declining birth rate and fertility rate | Statbel (fgov.be).

87 Further details of the CWR estimation method are available from: Dubuc, S. 2009. Application of the Own-Children Method for estimating fertility by ethnic and religious groups in the UK, *Journal of Population Research* 26, DOI 10.1007/s12546-009-9020-7.

88 Age-specific birth rates of Belgian women (corresponding to TFR 1.61 in 2019) were inflated by 10% to obtain a fertility schedule corresponding to TFR 1.77. Source of age-specific fertility rates of Belgian women: *World Population Prospects 2020*, World Population Prospects – Population Division – United Nations.

The fertility of haredi women in Israel in the first fifteen years of the twenty-first century has been around 7 children per woman. Very similar levels of fertility (TFR around 6.5) have been observed among haredi Jews in Britain. Our earlier estimation of the annual number of births among haredi women in Antwerp (around 330) used the crude birth rate of haredi populations in Israel and the UK. This annual number of births corresponds to a TFR around 6 children per woman. This has been ascertained by applying the age-specific fertility rate of haredi Jews in Israel to the age structure of the 10,000 haredim in Antwerp, whose age and sex distribution is assumed to resemble the distribution of British haredi Jews.[89]

There is no reasonable way to estimate the fertility of non-haredi Jews in Antwerp. A significant part of this population is traditional in outlook and is likely to display fertility levels close to those observed among religious non-haredi Jews in Israel, e.g. a TFR of 3–4 children per woman. Others, a secular minority, are likely to resemble Jews in Brussels in their patterns of fertility. We calculate the total TFR of Jews in Belgium by bringing together (and weighting) the TFR figures for three subgroups of Belgian Jews: Jews in Brussels (1.8), haredi Jews in Antwerp (6.0) and non-haredi Jews in Antwerp (assuming a TFR of 3.0, and the existence of a range of 1.8–4.0). We assume that the age and sex distribution of Jews in Brussels and Antwerp follow the respective distributions of mainstream and haredi Jews in Britain. This allows us to obtain the proportional shares of Brussels and Antwerp Jewish women of childbearing age (15–49 years) out of the total number of Jewish women in these age groups among Jews in Belgium, and to use these shares as weights. This exercise leads to the conclusion that the combined TFR of Jews in Belgium is around 3.6 children per woman ((1.77*0.41)+(6.0*0.37)+(3*0.22)), where 0.41, 0.37 and 0.22 are the proportions of Brussels, haredi Antwerp and non-haredi Antwerp women. Experimentation with a TFR as low as 2 and as high as 4 for non-haredi Jews in Antwerp, the least certain segment, self-evidently does not change the results in any significant way.

Turning to mortality, the total estimated annual number of Jewish deaths in Brussels is around 115. We do not possess the distribution of Jewish deaths by age and sex, so the direct estimation of death rates and life expectancy is not possible. However, we can compare the actual number of Jewish deaths in Brussels to the number that could be expected if death rates of Jews in Israel applied to this population. The expected number of deaths is 128, higher than the actual number. We can conclude on this basis that the life expectancy of Jews in Brussels is at least as high as the life expectancy of Jews in Israel (81.5 years for males and 85.0 years for females in the years 2017–2018). The situation in Antwerp is much the same: the annual number of haredi deaths handled by the main haredi burial society is 30, and the number predicted by applying Israeli Jewish death rates is 43. Direct estimations of mortality in Israel indicate that haredi longevity is similar to, or higher than the longevity of non-haredi Jews. This seems to be supported by our data.[90]

Migration of Jews to and from Belgium

The migration of Jews from Belgium to Israel (aliya) is well documented. The five-year average number of Jewish migrants from Belgium to Israel for the years 2016–2020 was about 125 excluding

89 Source of TFR and age-specific fertility rates of haredi Jews are: (1) Staetsky, L.D. and Boyd, J. 2015. *Strictly Orthodox rising: what the demography of British Jews tells us about the future of the community.* Institute for Jewish Policy Research, and (2) Hleihel, A. 2017. *Fertility among Jewish women in Israel, by level of religiosity, 1979–2017.* Working Paper 101. Jerusalem: Central Bureau of Statistics.

90 Death rates and life expectancy figures of Israeli Jews relating to years 2017–2018 have been derived from the Statistical Abstract of Israel, years 2018–2020. Life expectancy figures of Israeli haredi Jews are shown in: Central Bureau of Statistics, Israel. 2019. *Health and social profile of the localities in Israel 2011–2017.* (Hebrew). https://www.cbs.gov.il/en/mediarelease/Pages/2019/Health-Social-Profile-Localities-in-Israel-2011-2017.aspx.

immigrant citizens, and about 200 including immigrant citizens.[91] The FRA survey of Jews in Belgium indicates that 56% of the Jews in Belgium who are making active preparations for migration plan to relocate to Israel, whilst 44% plan to relocate elsewhere. Thus, the probable scope of outflow of Jews from Belgium is about 357 per year (200*100/56).

The exact volume of the inflow of Jews from Israel to Belgium is unknown. However, we know something about the relationship between stocks of migrants to and from Belgium. The number of Belgian-born Jews in Israel at the end of 2020 was 7,625, and the number of Israeli-born Jews in Belgium is estimated at 3,500. So, the overall migration balance versus Israel is decisively negative for Belgian Jews: for every two Jews who have left Belgium, one Jew came in. In the absence of better information, we can assume that this 2:1 relationship holds annually.

We further assume that with respect to places other than Israel, migration streams of Jews from and to Belgium by and large balance each other, i.e. a zero net migration balance. This assumption stems from the near equality in the estimated stocks of Belgian Jewish migrants in places other than Israel and foreign-born Jews (other than Israelis) living in Belgium. We estimate that 6,670 foreign-born Jews (not from Israel) lived in Belgium in the end of 2020. The number of Jews born in Belgium and living outside of Belgium (but not in Israel) is an estimate made on the assumption that aliya to Israel constitutes 56% of all immigration of Jews from Belgium, calculated as (7,625*100/56)–7,625=5,911.

Population growth of Jews in Belgium: present, past and future

Combining the assessment of natural increase with data on migration balance leads to the following conclusions regarding the situation around 2020:

1. The balance of births and deaths of Belgian Jews was positive at about 360.

2. The migration balance was negative, at about –100 (calculated as the difference between the probable outflow of 200 to Israel and the offsetting inflow at about half that number, assuming a zero balance vis à vis places other than Israel).

3. Under these assumptions, the resulting annual rate of increase is expected to be positive at 9 per 1,000 (calculated as (360–100)/29,000*1,000). This is still very high by Belgian and Western European standards.

Our assessment relates to a particular year; it is a snapshot of a moment in the history of the Belgian Jewish population. The situation may have been different in the past and it may change in the future. The central feature to note is that there is significant volatility of growth. The years 2010–2015 were years of higher aliya with the outflow to Israel being at a level of 300 (including immigrant citizens); consequently, migration balance during those years could stand at –150, or even –200. Assuming approximately the same natural balance around 2020 would mean that the annual rate of increase could have been about 5.5 per 1,000.

The second feature to note is the uncertainty of demographic developments in Brussels. At present, our best, most cautious, assessment is that the Jewish population of Brussels is stagnating, but it could be that it is declining slowly, further trimming the population growth among Jews in Belgium. Moreover, it is possible that the stability is a new development and that the Brussels Jewish population had declined more significantly in the past. Today, the household size of Jews in Brussels is very similar to the household size of the mainstream British Jewish population, suggesting the possibility that fertility

91 The officially published flows of immigrants from Belgium to Israel exclude immigrant citizens, i.e. Jews born in Belgium to parents who are Israeli citizens temporarily residing in Belgium. The official figures, all the way back to 1948, can be obtained from the publications of the Central Bureau of Statistics-Israel. Figures including immigrant citizens have been obtained by special request and prepared by Marina Sheps, Head of Migration Statistics Division in the Central Bureau of Statistics, Israel.

may be similar as well. The total fertility rate of non-haredi British Jews was just below 2 children per woman in 2011 – a number that is conducive to very gradual long-term population decline.[92] Our estimate of the fertility of Jews in Brussels today suggests a TFR of about 1.8 children per woman. It is possible that in the past even lower levels of fertility were observed with a resulting population decline. It is known that in many Western European populations fertility declined sharply between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s and stabilised afterwards. If non-haredi Jews in Brussels and the UK followed that path, it would be reasonable to expect their numbers to decline in the absence of very significant in-migration.

Experts in Jewish demography described the numerical development of Belgian Jews as gradual decline from about 33,000 in the 1980s to 29,000 in 2020. Looking at this armed with the new data analysed for this study, this was not an unreasonable assessment. The Jewish population of Brussels may have been declining, as described previously, along with all other parts of the country apart from the Jewish population of Antwerp. The Antwerp community may have been growing at a slower pace than now simply because the haredi population was smaller at that time.

Our conclusion, upon consideration of all the data available, is that in the future the Jewish population in Brussels is most likely to remain stable, although there is a small prospect of growth. The small numbers of Jews in areas outside of Brussels and Antwerp will continue to decline. Antwerp will experience growth due to the fact that it is numerically dominated by the haredi population with its high fertility and youthful age structure. It is clear that in the past, migration trimmed the growth in Antwerp somewhat yet did not prevent it from happening: about 1,700 haredi Jews lived in Antwerp around 1965;[93] if one assumes 3.5%–4% annual growth, the Antwerp haredi population in 2020 should have been in the range of 11,000–14,000. Given that our estimates for 2020 put the haredi population of Antwerp at 10,000, it is 7%–30% lower than expected on the basis of 3.5%–4% annual growth, indicating a negative migration balance on the whole, during the period of 1965–2020.

Still, it is very difficult to project the scale of future growth there, mainly because the future migration patterns of the Antwerp population are uncertain. New economic winds are blowing in Antwerp at present and it remains to be seen just how the occupational structure of the haredi society adjusts to these changes and how migration movements are affected as a result.

Being strictly empirical and using the realities of growth observed during the first two decades of the twenty-first century, we project three possibilities of growth for the Belgian Jewish population as a whole:

1. Numerical stability, which would result from numerical decline in Brussels and regions outside Brussels and Antwerp, and very slow growth in Antwerp which would be severely trimmed by migration. For that scenario to occur, migration to Israel has to reach the record volume of 2010–2015 and remain unbalanced by the incoming flow of Jews to Belgium.

2. Growth at 0.9% per annum, which would result from the realities observed around 2020, as previously described, including the 2016–2019 levels of migration and the natural balance observed around 2020.

3. Growth at 0.5% per annum, which would result from combining the natural balance around the year 2020 with the levels of migration seen in 2010–2015.

92 See Staetsky, L. D. and Boyd, J. 2015. *Strictly Orthodox rising: what demography of British Jews tells us about the future of the community.* Institute for Jewish Policy Research, pp. 18–19.

93 Source: Gutwirth, J. 1968. Antwerp Jewry today, *The Jewish Journal of Sociology* 10 (1), pp. 122–123. The total number of Jewish households in Antwerp is estimated at 2,750 around 1965, with 11%-12% (about 316) being haredi. Assuming that the average number of persons per haredi household was in the range of 5–5.5, gives about 1,700 haredi individuals.

The 0.5% and 0.9% levels of projected annual growth are remarkably similar to the projected levels for Jews in Austria, produced by independent methods.[94] Applying these different rates of growth results in a range of projections for the years 2030, 2040 and 2050. The scenario of numerical stability predicts that the Jewish population size will be at 29,000 from 2020 till 2050. The 0.5% and 0.9% levels of growth would lead to 34,000 or 38,000 Jews in Belgium in 2050, respectively.

94 Staetsky, L.D. and DellaPergola, S. 2020. *Jews in Austria: a demographic and social portrait*. European Jewish Demography Unit/ Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

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