

# Second Survey of European Jewish Leaders and Opinion Formers, 2011

April 2012



# Executive Summary

## Overview

Launched by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee's International Centre for Community Development (JDC-ICCD) and conducted by a research team at Trinity College (Hartford, CT, USA) between June and October 2011, the *Second Survey of European Jewish Leaders and Opinion Formers* presents the results of an online survey administered to 328 respondents in 32 countries. The 191-item survey (see appendix) was conducted in five languages: English, French, Spanish, German and Russian. *The European Jewish Leaders and Opinion Formers* survey is conducted every three years using the same format, in order to identify trends and their evolution. Thus, the findings of the 2011 edition are assessed and observed taking into account the previous survey, conducted in 2008.

The survey asked Jewish leaders and opinion formers a range of questions, seeking their views on the major challenges and issues concerning European Jewish communities in 2011 and their expectations for how their community's situation would evolve over the next 5-10 years. Questions dealt with topics relating to internal community structures and their functions as well as the external environment impinging on those communities. They were organized under the following headings:

- Vision & Change
- Decision-making & Accountability
- Lay Leadership
- Professional Leadership
- Status Issues & Intermarriage
- Population Groups
- Organizational Frameworks
- Funding
- Denominational Tensions
- Anti-Semitism/Security
- Europe
- Israel
- Priority Topic Choices for the Community

## Respondents

For the purposes of gathering the sample of respondents for this survey, we considered that the following roles fulfilled the criteria for being "leaders" and "opinion formers": executive directors and programme coordinators as well as current and former board members of Jewish organizations, rabbis from the various

religious denominations, principals of Jewish schools and professionals in education, directors or owners of newspapers and publications of communal content, intellectuals, academics, and/or recognized thinkers in each country whose topics of study are oriented toward matters that affect the local, European and global Jewish communities, as well as significant donors to the communities. The initial list of potential respondents was provided by JDC-ICCD.

Drawn from a wide variety of European socio-demographic backgrounds, Jewish leaders and opinion formers cannot be easily stereotyped. This probably accounts for their emphasis on community pluralism and inclusion. The statistical analysis underscores the predictive unreliability of characteristics such as region, gender, age, denomination and education among the leaders of European Jewish communities as regards opinions on community priorities and organization. Synagogue denomination is a predictive factor only regarding intermarriage and Jewish status issues and, to some extent, attitudes towards Israel.

Several points should be taken into consideration regarding the results of the survey. Firstly, 80% of the respondents are from "within" the communities (54% lay leaders; 25% community professionals; 3% rabbis) constituting an approximation of a representative sample of Jewish community leaders. Secondly, the survey process was conducted in full transparency and respondent attitudes and opinions were aired confidentially and without censorship. This applies particularly to the qualitative data, as the strength of respondent arguments does not depend on how many people agreed with them, but rather on the internal logic and persuasiveness of the views they convey.

## Future Priorities for Jewish Communities

These focused on issues within the leadership's sphere of influence. The three highest priorities in order of importance were: *including young leadership in decision-making bodies; strengthening Jewish education; supporting Jews in need in your community*. Younger respondents were more likely to prioritize *non-institutional/entrepreneurial activities* but place less importance on combating anti-Semitism, while older leaders are more likely to prioritize *supporting Jews in distress around the world and supporting Jews in need in the community*.

## Threats to the Future of Jewish Life

A majority of respondents cited *alienation of Jews from Jewish community life* (67%) and *demographic decline*

(60%) as major threats to the future of Jewish life. The Orthodox describe mixed marriages as a *very serious threat* to a higher percentage than other groups, though the proportion has shrunk from approximately 60% (2008) to approximately 40% (2011).

## Status Issues & Intermarriage

Issues concerning Jewish status, non-Orthodox conversions, and community membership are important concerns in all communities. The overall tendency is to be inclusive and accommodating rather than exclusive and strict. For example, 93% of respondents showed a range of inclusive attitudes to the issue of accepting children of mixed marriages in Jewish schools and less than 1% supported their total refusal. Opinions on these matters were mostly divided according to religious denomination and in some cases they were sources of community tensions as reported by respondents (42% expect denominational tensions to increase in the future).

## Community Financial Situations

The overall assessment of the current financial position of the communities varied considerably. Most respondents saw their communities' funding situation as *tight but currently manageable* (42%) and some described it as *tight but increasingly unmanageable* (25%). Whereas 17% saw their financial situation as *healthy*, 12% reported it as *critical*. As regards the next 5-10 years, responses tended toward pessimism: 38% expected the general financial situation of the community to *deteriorate somewhat or significantly* and only 28% expected it to *improve somewhat or significantly*.

## Security & Safety

Respondents were asked how safe they felt to live and practise as Jews in their countries.

Most European Jewish leaders felt secure with 26% reporting that they felt *very safe* and 62% reporting that they felt *rather safe*. Only 9% felt *rather unsafe* and a mere 3% *not safe at all*. There were no statistically significant differences between the socio-demographic or regional groups with regard to this issue. This lack of regional variation is noteworthy and of historical significance for Jews in Europe. It is important to point out that this survey was carried out before the terrorist attack against a Jewish school in Toulouse, France in March 2012.

## Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism was not considered to be a major threat to Europe's Jewish leaders (only 26% considered it as a *very serious threat*). When asked if they expected changes over the course of the next 5-10 years regarding anti-Semitism, however, respondents tended to be slightly pessimistic with 49% expecting the prejudice to *increase*. Western European respondents were more likely to consider anti-Semitism as a threat than were Eastern Europeans (30% vs. 14%). Right-wing nationalist parties, however, were widely considered to be a threat (46%).

## Europe

Both as a Jewish and a general political project, Europe is very popular among respondents. The 51% who believe it important that their community belong to European Jewish organizations contrasts, however, with the significantly smaller percentage (15%) who describe themselves as being familiar with the goals and programmes of the main European Jewish organizations. Furthermore only 22% of respondents declared they had direct knowledge of other Jewish communities in Europe. Jewish solidarity and a European Jewish identity were strongly supported.

## Israel

The relationship with the State and people of Israel is regarded as of great importance to European Jewish communities but there is wide recognition that this relationship has become more problematic and contentious in recent years, as events in the Middle East have reverberated through Europe. It was perhaps in recognition of this fact that the greatest consensus (at 85% agreement) agreed that *Jewish communities should provide opportunities for members to share different opinions and points of view on Israel and its policies*. There was also a strong consensus (85%) affirming that *events in Israel sometimes lead to an increase of anti-Semitism in my country*.

## Changes since 2008 (%)

Communities were characterized as suffering under greater financial strain (41% in 2011 vs. 28% in 2008). Respondents from Eastern Europe were more likely to respond that their financial situation was healthy or stable than those in Western Europe. Generosity among those who contribute (relative to their means) through charitable

giving was thought to have decreased significantly (28% in 2011 vs. 35% in 2008).

As regards security there has been an 11% decrease in people who feel “very safe” in their city and more people across all socio-demographic groups assessed anti-Semitism as a very serious threat. Respondents overall, however, feel less pessimistic about the prospect of anti-Semitism increasing (49% in 2011 vs. 54% in 2008).

Orthodox opinion has become more accommodating on the issues of Jewish status and intermarriage. The percentage of Orthodox more willing to recognize as Jews those converts *who define themselves as living a committed Jewish life* rose from 40% in 2008 to 49% in 2011. In 2008, 61% of Orthodox believed that mixed marriages were a *very serious threat*, whereas in 2011 only 44% believed this.

Overall, in terms of current challenges, there has been an increase in concern about demographic decline (60% in 2011 vs. 41% in 2008), and weakness of Jewish organizations (46% in 2011 vs. 33% in 2008). Alienation from the community now feels like more of a threat (67% in 2011 vs. 50% in 2008). On the other hand, the increasing rate of mixed marriages is no longer regarded as the *most serious threat* to communities (54% in 2011 vs. 64% in 2008). Poverty in the communities, though not considered to be a major threat, increased in perceived significance by 9%.