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Prevention of antisemitism in German sport organisations: learning from football?

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ABSTRACT

A growing body of literature has highlighted antisemitism as a specific form of discrimination in football. A recent study from Germany revealed that many football players in Maccabi clubs have experienced antisemitic incidents, whereas such experiences were less frequent in other sports. The comparatively high incidence of antisemitism in football is mirrored by increasing efforts of German clubs and associations to address the issue. However, little is known about how other sports are responding to antisemitic discrimination. To fill this gap, this study investigates to what extent German sport associations (N = 105) are aware of antisemitism and have implemented measures to combat it. The methodological approach mirrors that of an earlier football-focused study, combining standardised analyses of associations' websites with qualitative evaluations of mission statements and other documents. A comparison between football and other sports reveals both contrasts and similarities. Considering antisemitism as a historical phenomenon only, or unclear reporting mechanisms, appear as common problems. But while football organisations have developed several strategies and measures, many other sport organisations have not established specific approaches to address antisemitism. Accordingly, recommendations for different types of organisations can be derived.

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Lifelong Learning

1. Introduction

Amongst the manifold forms of discrimination in sports, antisemitism appears to be rather peculiar. On the one hand, its historical dimension, i.e. the role of sports during the Shoah and the Nazi era, has been an ongoing and prominent topic in public discourse and academia, especially in Germany (Müller & Haut, 2021). On the other hand, its relevance as a contemporary – and not only historical – phenomenon had been neglected for a long time. Contemporary antisemitism in sport has attracted attention only since the 2010s, and far more so since antisemitic incidents in Germany increased sharply following the Hamas attacks of 7 October 2023 and the ensuing war (Bundesverband RIAS (Research and Information Centre on Antisemitism), 2025). Several football clubs and associations, especially in Britain, Germany and the Netherlands, have launched activities and campaigns to prevent and combat antisemitic discrimination (e.g. changingthechants.eu). At the same time, the topic has increasingly been addressed in sociological research, especially focusing on football (Brunssen & Schüler-Springorum, 2021; Curtis, 2019; Dart & Long, 2021; Poulton, 2020). As a key finding, a study from Germany (Müller et al., 2023) revealed that many football players in the Jewish Maccabi clubs¹ have experienced antisemitic incidents, whereas such experiences were less frequent among Maccabi members participating in other sports. While the comparatively high incidence of antisemitism in football is mirrored by increasing efforts of German clubs and associations to address the issue (Müller et al., 2025), little is known about how other sports are experiencing and responding to antisemitic discrimination.

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Therefore, a research project was initiated to examine how German sport organisations address antisemitism through their activities and public communication. After a review of the growing body of literature, the methodological approach of the study is outlined. It combines standardised analyses of sport organisations' websites (N=105) with qualitative evaluations of mission statements, policy frameworks, and related documents. In addition, a structured short survey was conducted among the sport organisations to complement the online analysis. Thus, the data allow an examination of how German sport organisations deal with antisemitism, and – by comparing the results with earlier studies on the issue in football clubs and associations (Brunssen, 2024; Müller et al., 2025) – to address the question of whether and how other sports might learn from football regarding prevention of antisemitism. Taking differences in organisational professionalisation and resources into account, the findings are used to derive recommendations for policy and practice. The article concludes with a discussion of limitations and avenues for future research.

2. Definitions, theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence

Defining antisemitism is complex and controversial (Marcus, 2015), and it is also difficult to distinguish its different forms in sports. As a starting point for the empirical analysis, a rather broad definition of antisemitism was adopted, in order to avoid overlooking relevant cases. Thus, the study relied on the definition provided by the German Independent Expert Group on Antisemitism, which defines antisemitism as 'attitudes and behaviors that attribute negative characteristics to individuals, groups, or institutions perceived as Jewish' (Unabhängiger Expertenkreis Antisemitismus, 2018, p. 24). Such a broad definition requires a categorisation of the different forms of antisemitism, not only to distinguish cases analytically, but also when aiming at preventing antisemitic incidents. Scholars have proposed different categorisations of antisemitism in sports, mostly focused on perpetrators and ideological motivations, but also on different types of incidents (Brunssen & Markovits, 2024; Poulton, 2025, pp. 261–292). The empirical analysis was guided by a combination of these categorisations, distinguishing two dimensions: the forms in which antisemitism manifests itself, and the ideological motives underlying it.

Antisemitism may appear in different forms, from direct physical assaults, via symbolic acts such as smearing, up to hate speech in different contexts (EU FRA 2024, pp. 23–38). Especially in the latter form, antisemitism often manifests itself indirectly, i.e. without any Jewish people being present. For instance, this is the case when the 'Jewish world conspiracy' or other rumours are discussed online. Almost 2000 antisemitic incidents on the internet were reported in Germany in 2024 (Bundesverband RIAS (Research and Information Centre on Antisemitism), 2025, p. 56). Furthermore, expressions of antisemitism are not necessarily directed at Jewish individuals who are actually present. This is the case especially when 'Jew' is used as an invective to devalue the opposing team (Brunssen, 2025; Poulton, 2016; Schubert, 2019) or classmates in PE who are not Jewish at all (Görtz, 2022).

Looking at ideological foundations, it seems obvious to mention racialised antisemitism first, based on an ideology of superiority usually found at the far-right (Brunssen & Markovits, 2024). In this form, antisemitism is rather similar to racism in sports, a derogation of constructed others (e.g. Doidge, 2016). This may be explained by social-psychological theory, according to which 'people who reject one out-group will tend to reject other out-groups. If a person is anti-Jewish, he is likely to be (...) anti any out-group' (Allport, 1954, p. 68). A broad overlap of antisemitic and racist, but also sexist, ableist or homophobic attitudes, has been confirmed empirically in several countries, for instance by research on the 'syndrome of group-focused enmity' (Zick et al., 2008).

However, it is essential to consider that there are differences between racism and antisemitism (Müller et al., 2025), too, as the latter comes with some specific motives. Firstly, modern antisemitism is a worldview that attributes complex societal processes (or malformations of capitalism) to the actions of Jews imagined as cunning and manipulative (Marcus, 2015; Salzborn, 2010). For instance, this becomes apparent in the term 'Jew Goal', used in situations when a football player (in a video game or 'real') squares the ball to a teammate for a safe goal instead of taking a – in the view of those using the term – more 'honest' one-on-one situation with the goalkeeper. Such communication reproduces the 'stereotype of the lecherous 'Jew' living off the hard-work and effort of others.' (Black et al., 2026) Unlike in many cases of racism, where the other is constructed as a minor, clearly inferior group, Jews are portrayed as being

quite powerful by illegitimate means. This allows antisemites to consider and portray themselves as oppressed rebels (Adorno & Horkheimer 1947/1969, pp. 177–194) and opens points of contact to supposedly leftist ideas.

Secondly, ‘Post-Shoah’ or ‘secondary’ antisemitism is a specific type, which cannot be understood without the historical background. Especially in Germany, it is a prominent form, coming with claims that remembrance is exaggerated and Jews take advantage of it, which may be explained as a defense against supposed accusations of guilt (Rensmann, 2017). Such ‘evocations’ of the Holocaust (Poulton, 2025, p. 261), either by glorifying or by downplaying it, are a frequent form of antisemitism in sports, too. Examples are players making fun about ‘no gas coming out of the showers’ in the facilities of a Jewish club (Müller, 2021, p. 35) or calling measures of German sports jurisdiction a ‘holocaust against the clubs’ (Zeit Online 2017).

Thirdly, ‘Israel-related antisemitism’ currently seems to be the most controversially discussed form. And the central question in these discussions is: when is criticising the state of Israel antisemitic? This is answered differently in rivaling definitions of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (2016) (<https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definition-antisemitism>) and the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (2021) (<https://jerusalemdeclaration.org/>). While the former builds upon the three Ds – demonisation, double standards, delegitimisation of Israel (Sharansky, 2004) – the latter does not consider criticism with ‘double standards’ as antisemitic per se (JDA §15). However, it agrees to consider it antisemitic to apply ‘the symbols, images and negative stereotypes of classical antisemitism (...) to the State of Israel’ or to hold ‘Jews collectively responsible for Israel’s conduct or treating Jews, simply because they are Jewish, as agents of Israel.’ (JDA § 6–7) This suggests considerably more common ground – at least in academic debates – about Israel-related antisemitism than public debates about single cases suggest. However, it is still necessary to consider specific cases and their context in order to determine whether a particular incident is antisemitic or not, as Dart (2022) has shown for certain sport-related protests. To give a concrete example: of course not all protests against Israeli policies are antisemitic. However, displaying a flag in which the Star of David is merged with the swastika, as observed at the 2025 Vuelta road cycling race (Mena-Watch, 2025), has to be considered antisemitic according to the JDA (§ 3, 5–6), too, as it explicitly includes applying swastikas to Jewish symbols, as well as minimising the holocaust. This is also the case when Israel’s military operations after 7 October 2023 are equated with Nazi Germany’s systematic extermination of millions of people – a typical case of ‘holocaust inversion’ (Klaff, 2019), which also shows the close connection between secondary and Israel-related antisemitism.

Finally, similar to Israel-related antisemitism, but also somewhat special, is antisemitism against Maccabi organisations (Brunssen & Markovits, 2024). Although Maccabi clubs regard themselves as Jewish institutions, the majority of their members are not Jewish, including Christian, Muslim, and non-confessional individuals—all of whom can become victims of antisemitic incidents, regardless of their relation to Israel or their views on its politics. This also leads to rather particular forms of intersectional discrimination (Turelli et al., 2026): Muslim Maccabi members report that they are not only subjected to antisemitic discrimination because they belong to a Jewish club, but also insulted as traitors to their own Muslim community because of the club’s supposed allegiance to Israel (Müller, 2021, p. 14).

Altogether, it should be acknowledged that antisemitism is a complex phenomenon, connected to racism but also marked by important particularities (Messerschmidt, 2024). Empirical research suggests that criticism takes on antisemitic qualities when it relies on negative collective attributions, moral inversion, or the transfer of historical guilt, rather than on references to specific policies or political actors (Kempf, 2015). Despite discussions about where Israel-related antisemitism begins, there is substantial common ground between competing definitions. Thus, many cases of antisemitism are not controversial in the academic discourse, and their number adds up to a significant problem in sports, too.

2.1. Empirical findings on antisemitic incidents and attitudes in sports

Large-scale surveys among Jewish populations indicate that antisemitic experiences are widespread and predominantly take subtle forms, such as insinuations and verbal harassment, while physical violence occurs less frequently but has severe consequences for perceived safety and everyday behaviour

(Zick et al., 2017). Research on antisemitism in sport draws on a combination of victim surveys, crime statistics, reporting systems, and attitudinal research, each capturing different dimensions of the phenomenon.

Official crime statistics provide few insights, as they reflect only a limited segment of the overall phenomenon. In Germany, the Federal Criminal Police Office's statistics on politically motivated crime (PMK) recorded a further increase in antisemitic offences in 2024. Within the category of hate crime, antisemitic offences rose by 20.8%, reaching a new peak of 6,236 recorded cases (Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat, 2025). As with previous years, these figures are widely regarded as underestimating the true prevalence of antisemitism, as they depend on reporting behaviour and legal classification. Civil society reporting centres, such as the Research and Information Centres on Antisemitism (RIAS), address this gap by documenting both criminal and non-criminal incidents, revealing substantially higher numbers and highlighting the relevance of everyday, low-threshold antisemitic practices (Bundesverband RIAS (Research and Information Centre on Antisemitism), 2025). At the same time, RIAS data do not provide sport-specific case numbers. Incidents are only differentiated by location, including the category stadium. However, many antisemitic incidents with a clear connection to sport occur in other locations or contexts—for instance when people wearing Maccabi clubwear are threatened in public, or when gyms and clubhouses are smeared with antisemitic graffiti (Müller, 2021, p. 34). Thus, the numbers for sport-related cases in the RIAS reports are rather estimates than precise. The same holds for reporting systems within sports, such as the German football association's 'Lagebild'. Based on referee reports, this data gives some indication about the total prevalence of incidents of discrimination in official (amateur) football matches – but does not allow to distinguish between antisemitic, racist, sexist, homophobic and other forms of discrimination (Deutscher Fußball-Bund, 2025). On an international level, large-scale surveys conducted by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) do not focus on sport specifically, but data shows that a notable and increasing share of reported antisemitic incidents occur in connection with sport events and sport-related public spaces (EU FRA 2018, 2024). These findings suggest that sport constitutes a relevant social arena for antisemitism and underline the likelihood of substantial underreporting at the organisational level.

Additional empirical evidence on antisemitism in organised sport is provided by survey-based research among members of Jewish sport clubs in Germany. Based on an online survey conducted within Makkabi Germany (Müller, 2021), a clear sport-specific differentiation emerges. While 68% of respondents who were active in football reported having experienced antisemitic incidents, this share dropped to 14% among members participating in other sports. Reported incidents covered a broad range of manifestations, including verbal abuse, stereotyping, and physical attacks, and were directed both at Jewish and non-Jewish athletes.

Respondents evaluate how sport organisations in Germany address antisemitism rather critically. A majority (51%) consider the issue to be largely ignored by sport associations. Assessments of whether antisemitic incidents are consistently sanctioned by the responsible bodies are characterised by uncertainty, with most respondents expressing indecisive views rather than clear agreement or disagreement. Only 3% consider sport clubs to be generally prepared to deal with antisemitic incidents, while an additional 24% see them at least partially competent. Overall, evaluations of organisational engagement do not differ substantially between subgroups, i.e. members in other sports than football considered it a problem, too (Müller et al., 2023).

In contrast to findings from Germany, qualitative research among Jewish community members in the United Kingdom suggests a lower visibility of overt antisemitic incidents in everyday sport participation, while pointing to persistent forms of cultural ignorance and subtle exclusion, such as limited awareness of Jewish religious practices and scheduling conflicts (Dart & Long, 2021). Drawing on survey data and qualitative accounts from Jewish adolescents in organised youth sport in the United States, Silverman (2024) shows that antisemitic verbal harassment and exclusionary practices occur in everyday training and competitions. The study also highlights psychosocial consequences of such experiences, and identifies a lack of institutional awareness and preventive structures at the grassroots level. Also from other countries, several case studies on fan scenes in professional football show frequent incidents of different forms of antisemitism – and also different reactions against it (Bradley, 2024; Brunssen & Schüler-Springorum,

2021; Poulton, 2025). In this respect, German football seems to be rather special (Brunssen & Markovits, 2024).

Attitudinal research complements incident-based data by situating antisemitism within the broader framework of group-focused enmity. Survey-based studies from Germany show, on the one hand, that sports club members show lower levels of agreement with antisemitic statements than non-members, but this association loses statistical significance if sociodemographic factors (education, gender, and age) are controlled for (Burrmann et al., 2025). On the other hand, within all sport club members, football club members agree significantly more often with several antisemitic statement than members of other sport clubs, as a secondary analysis of survey data from Saxony-Anhalt and Brandenburg indicates. For example, while 25% of sport club members in general agreed with the statement that ‘many Jews try to take advantage of the history of the Third Reich today,’ agreement among football club members reached 39% (Delto et al., 2023, pp. 57–58).

Although research and available data are limited, findings on incidents indicate that antisemitism is visible in sports across different nations, but that incidents happen most frequently in football. Findings from different countries suggest that victims perceive that sport organisations’ awareness of and responses to antisemitism are insufficient.

2.2. *(Perceived) measures of sport organisations*

The Building Bridges study (Brunssen, 2024) combined an online survey of over 100 football stakeholders from clubs, leagues, and associations across 14 European countries, with a separate survey targeting representatives of Jewish organisations and Jewish sport associations. Not surprisingly, the study reveals differences between football organisations and Jewish institutions regarding their perception of problems with discrimination: while representatives of Jewish organisations considered antisemitism as a central challenge, representatives of football organisations primarily identified sexism and hostility towards LGBTQ+ persons as the most pressing issues. Accordingly, although nearly all surveyed organisations reported having adopted general anti-discrimination policies, targeted strategies addressing antisemitism were frequently lacking. Only around half of the football organisations reported active cooperation with Jewish communities aimed at incorporating affected perspectives into preventive measures. As further key challenges, the study identified limited awareness, resistance towards anti-discrimination initiatives within fan scenes, and insufficient contact points for affected individuals (Brunssen, 2024). Similarly, research on responses to antisemitism in English football highlights that governing bodies and anti-discrimination campaigns have addressed antisemitism only sporadically, and often in reactive or inconsistent ways (Poulton, 2020).

Based on a systematic analysis of public communication of clubs from the first four divisions in Germany, a previous study examined how antisemitism is addressed in German football at the institutional level (Müller et al., 2025). Across the analysed sample, 54% of the clubs explicitly referenced antisemitism on their websites. However, only one third of the clubs went beyond symbolic positioning, i.e. they documented at least one concrete activity such as: educational workshops on antisemitism for staff and volunteers, cooperation with Jewish organisations and civil society actors, the appointment of designated contact persons, and the integration of antisemitism into existing safeguarding or diversity frameworks. Importantly, the analysis documents a gradual shift in the content of organisational engagement: while references to Holocaust remembrance and historical responsibility remain central, an increasing number of clubs link these commemorative practices to more contemporary prevention efforts. Rather than replacing remembrance, these practices indicate a process of functional expansion, in which historical memory is increasingly connected to present-day organisational responsibilities. Moreover, the findings show that awareness of and engaging against antisemitism becomes significantly more likely with increasing organisational capacity and resources. Clubs competing in higher divisions, with larger membership bases and formalised corporate social responsibility (CSR) structures, are considerably more likely to address antisemitism.

Altogether, recent research indicates that antisemitism is considered a minor issue among football organisations, and that a lack of awareness is still criticised. At the same time, the relatively high

incidence of antisemitism in football is mirrored by increasing efforts of clubs and associations – at least in Germany – to address the issue (Müller et al., 2025). However, little is known about antisemitic incidents in other sports, and almost nothing can be said about how sport organisations outside football are monitoring, preventing, or responding to antisemitism.

To fill this gap, the present study analyses awareness of and activities against antisemitism among German sport organisations. These include 68 national associations representing their single sport, 19 regional organisations coordinating and representing the interests of all sport associations in their area, and 17 associations with special tasks. The organisations vary considerably in terms of the clubs and memberships they represent, ranging from very small associations such as the German Skibob Association with only 189 memberships, to large umbrella organisations and federations, including the German Football Association (DFB), which represents approximately eight million memberships, and regional sport organisations such as the North Rhine-Westphalia Sports Federation (5.3 million memberships). These differences are also reflected in financial resources and levels of professionalisation.

Research on German football clubs suggests that organisations with larger resources, membership bases, and formalised CSR structures are more likely to address antisemitism. This relation is supported by research showing that organisational characteristics influence the social engagement of sport clubs. Based on a survey of sport clubs from several European countries, Elmoose-Østerlund et al. (2022) identified organisational goals, structure, and resources, as predictors for the likelihood of clubs to take measures of social integration. Zeimers et al. (2021) identified innovative capacity, financial autonomy, knowledge, and human resources, as primary factors influencing social engagement of Belgian sport federations. Thus, despite considerable differences between (often highly professional) football clubs and (often non-profit or semi-professional) sport organisations, it seems reasonable to assume similar patterns, i.e. to expect higher awareness and more and different activities against antisemitism among organisations with more resources and professional structures. Accordingly, applying the same methodological approach to football clubs and sport organisations appears promising, and to compare findings accordingly.

3. Methods

To address this research gap, the present study was conducted as part of a federally funded programme on the prevention of extremism and discrimination in organised sport. Within this broader context, antisemitism outside football was identified as a relevant and under-researched field requiring further empirical investigation.

The research questions guiding the study are:

- Which measures and activities against antisemitism are implemented by German sport federations?
- Which discursive practices and dominant narratives can be identified in the communication of sports organisations regarding antisemitism?

To answer these questions, the methodological approach follows that of an earlier study focused on football (Müller et al., 2025), combining standardised analyses of organisations' websites with qualitative evaluations of mission statements, policy frameworks, and related documents (N=105). Additionally, a structured short survey on the perception of antisemitism and activities to address it was carried out among German sport organisations (N=34).

To cover all sports and relevant organisations, the sample includes official documents from the German Olympic Sports Confederation (DOSB) itself (1), as well as all of its member organisations: the national sport associations responsible for nationwide competitions, national team selection, and talent development within their respective sports (68); the 19 regional organisations, which coordinate the interests of organised sport at the regional level; and the 17 associations with special responsibilities, such as the university sports association and the physical education teachers' association.

As a first step, from June to October 2025, all official websites (105) of the organisations were examined regarding the existence of communication on antisemitism. This was done with a Google Site search

of entries from the last five years or with permanent embedding (e.g. in the organisation's mission statement). Therefore, a broad list of search terms related to antisemitism was used (see [Appendix A](#)).

As a second step, the documented activities were classified into three categories following the methodological framework proposed by Hoffmann (2018): (a) mentions of antisemitism (e.g. commemorative statements issued on Holocaust Remembrance Day), (b) activities explicitly addressing antisemitism (e.g. workshop formats), and (c) activities addressing discrimination more broadly (e.g. awareness days or public campaigns). While activities explicitly addressing antisemitism are also counted as references to the topic, many references consist solely of statements, commemorative messages, or other forms of communication and do not involve concrete organisational measures.

The categorisation was initially conducted independently by two researchers and subsequently reviewed jointly. Although no statistical measure of intercoder reliability was calculated, the level of agreement was very high. The only point of discussion concerned whether German–Israeli youth exchange programmes should be coded as activities explicitly addressing antisemitism. They were ultimately assigned to this category, as they were explicitly framed in terms of antisemitism prevention and educational objectives.

Thirdly, central narratives and communication strategies employed by sport organisations were analysed using the framework for qualitative discourse analysis developed by Mullet (2018). This involved the in-depth analysis of $N=40$ texts, speeches, and other forms of communication on antisemitism and measures against it. As the identification of relevant material was supported by a systematic keyword search of organisational websites, the sampling strategy can be classified as purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). For the critical discourse analysis (CDA), documents were analysed in greater depth with a focus on dominant narratives, framings, and silences within organisational communication. The final sample was selected according to the guiding principle of strategically selecting information-rich cases (Patton, 2002, p. 243). To ensure adequate representativeness and analytical depth, several criteria were applied, including differences in organisational size and type. In order to capture discursive variation, documents referring to prevention measures, mission statements, organisational self-descriptions, and statements on antisemitic incidents were included. Through iterative discussion and consensual validation within the research team (Patton, 2002, p. 246), no substantially new narratives, themes, or discursive patterns emerged during the later stages of analysis. The final sample of 40 documents was therefore considered sufficient to capture the major themes relevant to the research questions.

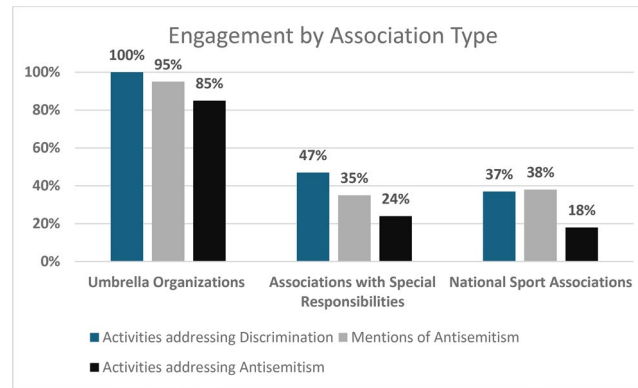
In addition, a structured short survey (Dillman et al., 2014) was carried out in order to gather information about incidents of and measures against antisemitism not communicated online, but also about the general perception of antisemitism and other forms of discrimination, and the organisational structures, policies, and procedures in place to prevent and address it. Items assessing the perceived relevance of different forms of discrimination used four-point Likert scales. For descriptive purposes, response categories were coded numerically (1–4), and mean values were calculated. The questionnaire (see [Supplementary Material S1](#)) was sent out to all 105 organisations via e-mail in August 2025. Informed consent was obtained by ticking the box on the introductory page of the online questionnaire. Despite several reminders in October and November, only $N=34$ organisations completed the questionnaire. This relatively low response rate may indicate a degree of self-selection and limits the representativeness of the survey findings. The survey results should therefore be interpreted as exploratory and descriptive and are primarily used to complement the document-based analyses.

4. Results

About half of the organisations examined (54 out of 105) do not mention antisemitism on their official websites. Among the remaining associations, 18 (17%) referred to antisemitism only once, for example in a youth regulation, an organisational history, or a single news item addressing reporting mechanisms in sport, whereas 33 associations (31%) included multiple references across different sections and document types. When focusing on concrete engagement, such as programmes, initiatives, or activities explicitly addressing antisemitism, about one third of the organisations report any form of practical involvement ([Table 1](#)). About half of these document a single activity, the other half refer to multiple activities.

Table 1. Activities of German sport organisations against antisemitism (N = 105).

Forms of engagement	Share
No activities	69% (72)
Single activity	15% (16)
Multiple activities	16% (17)

**Figure 1.** Activities against antisemitism by type of association (N = 105).

However, a majority shows no concrete antisemitism-related measures in their public communication. When broadening the perspective to include anti-discrimination measures more generally, the number of organisations with multiple activities rises to 38, thus the share of those without any measures drops to 50%.

The quantitative analysis also indicates differences in engagement with antisemitism between different types of organisation: All of the umbrella organisations (regional sport federations and DOSB), do report anti-discrimination activities (100%), and 95% of them explicitly refer to antisemitism in their communication (Figure 1). Concrete antisemitism-related activities are documented by 85% of the organisations in this group. Among the national sport associations, only 37% report anti-discrimination activities, 38% mention antisemitism, and 18% document concrete antisemitism-related activities. A comparable pattern can be observed among the associations with special responsibilities (Verbände mit besonderen Aufgaben): 47% report anti-discrimination activities, 35% mention antisemitism, and 24% document concrete activities addressing antisemitism. To summarise: The topic of antisemitism is predominantly present in the communication of regional sport federations, but is largely absent in the communication of other sports organisations.

To learn more about how organisational characteristics affect the engagement with antisemitism, further analyses were conducted without the regional sport federations, whose activities addressing antisemitism were already documented. The remaining analytical sample of N=82 national sport associations and associations with special responsibilities was split at the median by membership size. Successively, results showed that associations with more members more frequently reported at least one anti-discrimination activity (46%) than smaller associations (32%). Similar patterns emerged for references to antisemitism, with 49% of above-median associations mentioning antisemitism at least once, compared to 27% among below-median associations. Engagement in concrete activities addressing antisemitism was comparatively low overall, but again more prevalent among larger associations (27%) than among smaller ones (12%).

The analysis of statutory purposes and self-descriptions of the organisations reveals a differentiated picture with regard to normative positioning on discrimination and antisemitism. Thirteen of the 105 organisations examined have no substantive reference to anti-discrimination in their statutes, or just state to be 'politically neutral'.² By contrast, 80% of the organisations explicitly articulate an anti-discrimination stance in their statutes, typically emphasising equality and non-discriminatory participation in sport across a range of social categories, such as origin, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or gender. But only five organisations explicitly address antisemitism as a specific phenomenon in their statutory framework. Apart from references in formal statutes, normative commitment to equality and non-discrimination is often expressed in mission statements, guiding principles, or codes of ethics.

Regarding possibilities to report antisemitic incidents, the organisations show heterogeneous structures, responsibilities and procedures. These range from designated, professional contact persons and good governance officers, via ethics committees, to external ombudspersons or structures such as *Safe Sport*.³ As these reporting systems primarily focus on sexualised violence, their responsibilities for reporting cases of discrimination and antisemitism are often not specified and thus remain implicit. Furthermore, although the organisations frequently mention that reporting can be done anonymously, some of the websites and online-forms require personal identification, indicating ambivalent approaches to accessibility and protection. For 13 of the organisations examined, no concrete information on possible complaint or reporting mechanisms could be identified. This suggests that such mechanisms are either not established or not transparently communicated.

Findings from the CDA point to several recurring narratives and discursive patterns in how sport organisations frame and address antisemitism. Within these documents, antisemitism is consistently rejected and framed as incompatible with the fundamental values of sport and democratic coexistence. For instance: ‘There is no room for discrimination, racism, antisemitism, or any other form of dehumanisation’. In this sense, antisemitism is predominantly conceptualised as an individual moral issue, while it is rarely framed as requiring defined responsibilities, procedures, or prevention strategies by the organisation. Overall, moral responsibility and individual attitudes receive greater emphasis than the organisational structures and processes required to address antisemitism systematically.

Moreover, antisemitism is frequently embedded in broader enumerations of discrimination, but the phenomenon is not differentiated analytically. Notably, references to antisemitism often appear in direct connection with statements issued by the DOSB or the German Sports Youth (dsj), which are then reproduced verbatim on the websites of other sport associations. While this practice may be understandable in light of limited organisational resources, it may also obscure the specific dynamics of antisemitism.

In contrast to findings from football (Müller et al., 2025), the material contains almost no references to antisemitism occurring within the sport organisations’ own contexts. Instead, antisemitism is primarily discussed in relation to Jewish clubs and athletes, particularly Maccabi, or in response to broader societal developments. This suggests that antisemitism is predominantly framed as an external issue requiring solidarity rather than as a challenge emerging within organisations’ own spheres of responsibility.

In terms of substantive engagement, a strong focus on commemorative and remembrance-oriented activities emerged, reflecting patterns previously identified in football-related contexts. Organisations deal with the past in quite different ways: there are cases of systematic examinations of activities during the National Socialist period, explicitly acknowledging historical wrongdoing and engaging in critical reflection on its institutional past. But there are also cases of complete omission of the Nazi era, or narratives of rejecting any responsibility, claiming to have been ‘subjected, like most other sports organisations, to the dictates of the political system’. Activities dealing with antisemitism as a current phenomenon include: appointing a coordinator to address antisemitism and other forms of discrimination, offering workshops and training sessions on awareness-raising and prevention of antisemitism, or establishing reporting mechanisms for antisemitic incidents on websites and social media channels of organisations.

Beyond the visible statements and narratives, the material is also characterised by a notable form of discursive silence (Bindeman, 2017). While antisemitism is consistently rejected and frequently discussed in relation to Maccabi clubs, commemorative practices, or broader societal developments, sport organisations often remain silent regarding concrete responsibilities, prevention strategies, and responses to incidents within their own context.

In addition to the document-based analyses, a structured short survey was conducted to obtain exploratory insights into perceptions of discrimination and organisational responses within sports associations. Because the document analysis showed that information on whether and to whom antisemitic incidents can be reported is often unclear or not publicly communicated, the survey also included targeted questions on the existence of such reporting mechanisms. In total, N=34 associations participated, and not all respondents answered every item, resulting in varying case numbers across questions. Accordingly, the survey results are reported descriptively and serve primarily to contextualise the document-based findings.

Respondents were asked to assess (on a four-point Likert scale) the extent to which different forms of discrimination constitute a problem, first in German sport overall and, second, within their own sport.

Table 2. Mean values (1–4) of perceived relevance and organisational activity regarding different forms of discrimination.

To what extent do you consider the following forms of discrimination to be a problem...	... in German sport	... in your sport
Sexism	3.3	2.5
Anti-LGBTQ+ hostility (homophobia)	3.0	2.2
Anti-Muslim racism	2.6	1.8
Anti-Black racism	2.7	2.0
Antisemitism	2.7	1.8
Antigypsyism	2.6	1.9

A rather consistent pattern emerges (Table 2): Sexism is perceived as the most salient problem, particularly with regard to German sport as a whole, while assessments for respondents' own sport are noticeably lower. Other forms of discrimination – including antisemitism, anti-Black racism, anti-Muslim racism, and antigypsyism – are rated as moderately problematic at the aggregate level of German sport (mean values between 2.6 and 2.7), but again receive substantially lower ratings when respondents evaluate their own sport (e.g. antisemitism: mean = 1.8).

Against this background, associations were asked whether they were aware of concrete antisemitic incidents within their organisation or affiliated bodies. Only six associations reported such incidents, including references to antisemitic discrimination on the sports field and antisemitic statements in the context of debates about cooperation with Israeli sports organisations.

In a further item, associations were asked whether a designated contact or reporting mechanism for those affected by antisemitism exists within their organisation. Thirteen associations reported having an internal contact or reporting point, while five refer affected individuals to external reporting structures. Five associations stated that no corresponding contact or reporting mechanism currently exists, and four responses indicated unclear arrangements.

5. Discussion

Overall, the results reveal considerable variation in awareness of and activities against antisemitism across German sport organisations. This variation may reflect differences in organisations' exposure to antisemitic incidents, as well as differences in their responsibilities and available resources (as they are specific types of meta-organisations, see Thieme, 2025). The German Olympic Sports Confederation and almost all of the regional sport federations are aware not only of discrimination in general, but of antisemitism in particular, and have launched at least some activities against it. This is in line with findings from another study, identifying the regional sport federations as key players for prevention of anti-democratic tendencies and (right-wing) extremism in German sports (Seiberth et al., 2025). As these umbrella organisations are responsible for more general, political and educational issues affecting all sports, awareness of and engagement against antisemitism can reasonably be expected of them. However, the question arises if this organisational arrangement is sufficient in terms of addressing antisemitism: victims and witnesses encounter antisemitism within their specific sporting context, and it can be assumed that they will seek opportunities to report and cope with incidents directly within their specific sport clubs and associations first – and not within umbrella organisations for all sports rather distant to them.

Among the national sport organisations who are responsible for one specific sport, only about 35% mention antisemitism, and only about 20% document activities aimed at preventing or addressing it. This is also reflected by the survey results, according to which antisemitism is not considered a major problem by the organisations (comparable to results on football by Brunssen, 2024, p. 11), especially not in their own sport. It might be argued that there is simply no issue perceived as requiring attention and no need to take measures for other sport associations. However, the question is whether there are indeed no cases of antisemitism – or if they are not reported or not even recognised as such. In this respect, our findings indicate that many organisations lack dedicated reporting structures altogether, or tend to mix antisemitism with and subsume it under other forms of discrimination, resulting in uncertainty about where and how to report what type of incidents. This lack of specific awareness and reporting structures contributes to uncertainty about the prevalence and development of antisemitic incidents in different sports.

When antisemitism is explicitly addressed by sport organisations, it is often considered as a problem of the past only, but not as a current phenomenon. Results show that several organisations participate in remembrance activities or engage in coming to terms with their history during the Shoah, but do not address antisemitism as a contemporary phenomenon, particularly when Jewish persons or Maccabi clubs are not directly involved. Finally, our findings indicate that bigger organisations with more members are more likely to mention antisemitism and to launch measures against it. As for other forms of social engagement of sport clubs (Elmose-Østerlund et al., 2022), this seems to indicate that awareness and activities against antisemitism depend on degrees of professionalisation and available resources. However, against this general trend, there are also examples of meaningful engagement in organisations with comparatively limited resources and non-professional structures, pointing to the potential relevance of organisational identities (Nagel et al., 2026) or of committed individuals to drive change (Olmesdahl et al., 2025).

Our guiding question of whether, and in what ways other sports can learn from football, calls for comparing the cases, but we have to point to some pitfalls before doing so: first, findings according to which incidents seem less frequent in other sports than in football (Müller et al., 2023) rely on data stemming from 2020, and may be somewhat outdated. Second, it should be kept in mind that analyses of football focused *clubs* (Müller et al., 2025), while the present study focused on sport *associations*. Thus, we are dealing with different types of organisations which are comparable in some respects, but also have specific characteristics. That said, it seems legitimate to consider that more is done to prevent and tackle antisemitism in football than in other sports. Although they do not give antisemitism the highest priority (Brunssen, 2024), many football organisations communicate that they are aware of the problem. Importantly, this takes place in clubs, with which players and fans have a more direct contact. In other sports, awareness is present only in the – supposedly more distant – umbrella organisations, but rarely in the associations of the single sports. And although activities in football still often deal with antisemitism as a historical phenomenon (Müller et al., 2025), there is a stronger tendency than in other sports to consider it as a current problem, too. This goes along with relatively more established reporting structures for incidents, which are often unclear or not visible in many national sport organisations. Consequently, available data on antisemitic incidents in football appear more reliable than for other sports. Finally, in football as well as in other sports, organisational characteristics do matter, in the sense that higher degree of resources and professionalisation seem to strengthen awareness of and activities against antisemitism. And while in both cases there are examples of engagement despite lower resources, these examples seem to be even more frequent in football, due to grassroots initiatives. Altogether, although apples and oranges are compared here, it can be recommended for other sports to learn from football in some respect:

5.1. Recommendations

Despite the complexity of the topic and the limitations of the study (see below), several recommendations can be derived. Firstly, as the document analyses as well as the short survey results indicate that reporting structures are unclear or not existent in a large share of organisations, clear reporting structures and responsibilities should be established. This is important both for monitoring developments over time, but most of all in order to enable victims and witnesses of antisemitic incidents to document their cases and to get help when needed. At a low-threshold level, this may include the designation of contact persons within clubs or associations, the use of simple online or offline reporting tools, and transparent procedures outlining how reported incidents are processed and followed up, potentially in cooperation with external expert organisations where internal resources are limited. While sport organisations cannot be expected to develop comprehensive expertise for all forms of discrimination, it is essential that affected individuals clearly know where to turn to for support, ideally to trusted and, where possible, independent bodies. Secondly, as the analysis indicated a discrepancy between the general perception of the problem and the relatively low urgency attributed to the issue within respondents' own sports, preventive efforts should focus on raising awareness of antisemitism as a contemporary and multifaceted phenomenon. Rather than relying primarily on comprehensive training

programmes, which may exceed the capacities of volunteer-based structures, preventive approaches can draw on targeted information materials, basic sensitisation measures, and context-specific guidance for key actors such as coaches, referees, and volunteers. In this context, existing expertise from Jewish organisations and civil society actors can be utilised, as some dedicated funding structures already support preventive and educational work. Such measures may help reduce uncertainty in dealing with antisemitic incidents and facilitate their recognition, including more subtle forms. Thirdly, activities of the organisations should be supported by more research, especially in terms of a continuous monitoring of incidents, and by more rigorous evaluation of the outcomes of measures to prevent and tackle antisemitism in sports.

5.2. Limitations

While the methodological approach provided most of the intended information, it also has several limitations: In order to be able to differentiate more precisely between the different types of organisation, it would have been better to gather even more data about their structures, resources, and degree of professionalisation. Such additional information was sought through the short survey. However, despite several reminders, the response rate remained too low to support a more detailed analysis. Moreover, survey responses primarily reflect organisational perceptions and self-assessments rather than objective indicators of the prevalence of antisemitism or the actual extent of organisational engagement. This might have been partly mitigated through a more extensive collection of publicly available organisational data, including membership figures, budgets, and personnel resources. However, the study design and available data collection period did not allow for the systematic compilation of additional organisational indicators across all cases.

Consequently, the findings should primarily be interpreted as evidence of how organisations publicly position themselves regarding antisemitism, rather than as a comprehensive assessment of all incidents and activities undertaken. Sport organisations may engage in preventive or responsive activities without communicating them publicly, while, on the contrary, communicated engagement does not necessarily indicate 'successful' measures of tackling or preventing antisemitism.

Finally, particularly with regard to the critical discourse analysis: Where organisations do not address the issue at all in their public communication, no discursive material is available for analysis. Consequently, the study can assess how antisemitism is framed and addressed where it is communicated, but cannot draw conclusions about discursive strategies in cases of complete silence.

Apart from these specific limitations of our study, there are several gaps of knowledge to be addressed in further research: The major issue still is the lack of precise data on antisemitic incidents in sports. As the general reporting centres do not focus on sport-related incidents, and clear reporting systems within sports remain yet to be established, there is little to no long-term data, allowing to track trends, including potential changes in one or the other direction. Thus, continuous monitoring and longitudinal studies are urgently needed. This is even more the case for incidents affecting Jewish athletes outside the Maccabi clubs, which are rarely covered so far. Finally, existing strategies in football and other sports have to be systematically evaluated, in order to identify effective measures to prevent and tackle antisemitism.

6. Conclusion

Football is characterised by a comparatively high number of reported antisemitic incidents, but this is also reflected by growing awareness of and activities against antisemitism within clubs and associations. In contrast, many organisations in other sports show less awareness, and tend to consider antisemitism as a problem of the past only. While the umbrella organisations do have activities and contact persons, many German national sport organisations lack clear reporting structures, leading to uncertainty about the extent of antisemitism in different sports. The latter can learn from football to raise awareness for current antisemitism and to establish structures and procedures to report and handle antisemitic incidents. Further research is needed to estimate the development of the problem in different sports, and

to evaluate which measures are necessary and suitable for organisations with different structures and resources.

Notes

1. Maccabi is the name of the Jewish sports movement and several organisations belonging to it. According to Maccabi World Union, there are 450 clubs in more than 70 countries (maccabi.org). In Germany, there are about 40 sport clubs in different cities, adding up to more than 7000 members in the nationwide association Makkabi Deutschland (see <https://makkabi.de/ueber-uns/>). While the clubs consider themselves as Jewish, a broad share of their members are Christian, Muslim, of other or no confession. The clubs in football, basketball or other competitive sports take part in the regular German league systems.
2. While many associations employ current anti-discrimination terminology, a small number of organisational documents still contain outdated or anachronistic formulations, such as references to being “neutral with regard to race”.
3. In Germany, the Ansprechstelle Safe Sport serves as a central contact point for confidential reporting and guidance, in cases of abuse, harassment, or discrimination (<https://ansprechstelle-safe-sport.de/>).

Ethics declarations

Ethical approval was provided by the ethics committee of the Faculty of Psychology and Sport Science at Goethe University Frankfurt and the abovementioned study receives ethical approval due to its general properties. It did not need to undergo an individual ethical review, because it falls into a category of studies that are exempt from individual review.

Informed consent

Informed consent was obtained by ticking the box on the introductory page of the (German) questionnaire.

Author contributions

CRedit: **Jan Haut:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Lasse Müller:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Christopher Heim:** Conceptualization, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Project administration, Resources, Supervision, Writing – review & editing; **Ferdinand Hasselbeck:** Data curation, Investigation, Visualization.

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The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, JH, upon reasonable request. The data are not publicly available due to containing information that could compromise the privacy of research participants.

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Appendix A. Keywords used for the systematic website search

Thematic block	German search terms*	English gloss
Discrimination	Rassismus; rassistisch*	Racism; racist
	Diskriminierung; diskriminierend*	Discrimination; discriminatory
	Fremdenfeindlichkeit; fremdenfeindlich*; ausländerfeindlich*; Xenophobie	Xenophobia; xenophobic
	Extremismus; extremistisch*; Rechtsextremismus	Extremism; extremist; right-wing extremism
	islamistisch*	Islamist
Antisemitism	Vorurteile	Prejudice
	Exklusion; Ausgrenzung	Exclusion; marginalisation
	Antisemitismus; antisemitisch*	Antisemitism; antisemitic
	judenfeindlich*	Anti-Jewish, hostile towards Jews
	Jude; Jüdin; jüdisch*; Judentum	Jew; Jewish; Judaism
	Holocaust; Shoah; Schoa	Holocaust; Shoah
	Nationalsozialismus; nationalsozialistisch*	National Socialism; National Socialist
	IHRA; Antisemitismusdefinition	IHRA; working definition of antisemitism

Note: All searches were conducted with the German terms. An asterisk indicates that all inflected forms of the adjective were included (e.g. rassistisch, rassistische, rassistischer, rassistisches, rassistischen, rassistischem).