

# Antisemitism and Immigration in Western Europe Today Is there a connection?

## The case of the Netherlands

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### Preface

This summary is taken from the report, *Antisemitism and Immigration in Western Europe Today: is there a connection? The case of the Netherlands*. This national report contributes to a larger research project conducted in 2016/2017 across five European countries: Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

A final report, *Antisemitism and Immigration in Western Europe Today: is there a connection? Findings and recommendations from a five-nation study* draws out common trends, makes comparisons, and provides recommendations for civil society organisations and for governments.

The research was commissioned by the Foundation 'Remembrance, Responsibility and Future' (EVZ) based in Berlin, and was led by the Pears Institute for the study of Antisemitism, Birkbeck, University of London.

### About the project

There is a persistent claim that new migrants to Europe, and specifically migrants from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA migrants), carry antisemitism with them. This assertion is made to different degrees in different countries and can take different forms. Nevertheless, in Europe, the association of rising antisemitism with migrants from the Middle East and North Africa is widespread and needs to be evaluated.

MENA migrants have been symbolically central to the migration debate since 2011. These years have been framed by the Arab spring and its aftermath and by Europe's crisis of refugee protection. This research project has focused specifically on MENA migrants,<sup>1</sup> in response to the intensity of this debate, and in accordance with the brief from Foundation EVZ. The central concern of this research has been to investigate whether the arrival of MENA migrants since 2011 has had an impact on antisemitic attitudes and behaviour in Western Europe. This report deals with the case of the Netherlands. The report also considers whether government and civil society agencies have identified a problem of antisemitism among MENA migrants. The findings are based on an extensive survey of the existing quantitative and qualitative evidence. Additionally, new qualitative research has been undertaken to investigate the experiences and opinions of a range of actors.

## Context

- At the time of writing, the largest Middle East and North Africa (MENA) groups in the Netherlands are Turkish and Moroccan Dutch. In 2016 there were 385,000 inhabitants with a background from Morocco and 397,000 from Turkey. Half of these were born in the Netherlands (the second and the now emerging third generation). Together they make up some 4.5% of the total population. Other relatively large groups from countries with a predominantly Muslim population are Somalians, Iranians, Iraqis, Afghans and Syrians.
- It is estimated that there are around 1 million Muslims in the Netherlands, constituting some 5-6% of the total population.
- There are fewer Jews in the Netherlands than Muslims; estimates range between 40,000 and 50,000. Emigration from and immigration to Israel is a modest phenomenon and there are no signs that Dutch Jews choose to leave the country to live in Israel.

## Findings

### Immigration and demography

- The category of 'non-Western' migrants, consisting predominantly of people from Asia and Africa, and the majority of them of Muslim faith, has increased since the mid-1990s.
- From 2014 onwards, both the composition of 'non-Western immigrants' and net migration changed due to the growing numbers of asylum seekers, especially from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. The number of migrants from North Africa (most from Morocco) has decreased, while immigration from the Middle East and Eritrea has increased considerably since 2011. The Syrian population in the Netherlands has grown in particular, from 10,000 in 2010 to 45,000 in 2017, whereas the number of Eritreans increased from 2,000 to 9,000. The numbers of Afghans and Iraqis have also risen, from 38,000 to 45,000 and 53,000 to 57,000 respectively.
- As of 2017, the Middle Eastern population in the Netherlands numbers 200,000 (including 56,000 from Iraq, 44,000 from Syria, 44,000 from Afghanistan and 38,000 from Iran). Excluding Moroccans, the number of North Africans is lower (42,000), with Egyptians (23,000) by far the largest group.

### Antisemitism since 2011

- Perceptions of Jews in the Netherlands are relatively positive when compared with other European countries, and when compared with attitudes towards Muslims and Roma.
- Dutch respondents agree more easily with survey statements blaming Jews for policies of the Israeli state as compared with 'classic' antisemitic stereotypes of Jews being responsible for the outbreak of wars or having control over the media.
- Since 2000, the number, scale and intensity of recorded antisemitic incidents has fluctuated in line with Israeli military operations, with peaks in 2002, 2006, 2009 and 2010. There was a small peak in 2012 and a higher peak in 2014.

- Most of the reported antisemitic incidents concern verbal or written antisemitic statements. Less common are incidents involving violence in the form of verbal abuse, threat, harassment and rarer still, are those which feature graffiti, vandalism and arson.
- As elsewhere in Western Europe, the Second Intifada of 1999/2000 changed patterns of antisemitism in the Netherlands: there has been a marked increase in its scale and vehemence, coinciding with Israeli military operations against Palestinians, and the emergence of Moroccan-Dutch youngsters (and to a lesser extent other Dutch Muslim citizens) as perpetrators of antisemitic verbal or physical abuse, resulting in the worst cases of Jews being assaulted on the street.
- Since 2000, a series of antisemitic incidents have contributed to a recurrent public debate about antisemitism and made it a serious issue for many Jews in the Netherlands. Concerns among Jews about antisemitism have been on the rise since the antisemitic terrorist attacks in Europe of 2012, 2014 and 2015.
- Existing government and civil society reports on antisemitism do not contain records of refugees or recent immigrants as perpetrators of antisemitic incidents or as people with anti-Jewish attitudes.
- Extreme right-wing activism against immigration and immigrants has led to a number of antisemitic incidents.
- There is anecdotal evidence that Jewish asylum seekers in reception centres have become the target of harassment.

### **Public discourse**

- The issues of immigration and Islam are fiercely debated. Public debate about these topics is characterized by polarization between a multicultural anti-racist pole and an anti-immigration and anti-Islam pole. The problematization of immigration, Islam and Muslims by populist parties has partly been taken over by mainstream parties.
- The emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), recent terrorist attacks in Europe and the rise in the number of immigrants arriving in the Netherlands in 2014/2015 have contributed to the focus on Islam and immigration in public debate.
- Antisemitism is primarily discussed in connection with immigration and Islam; these debates are often vehement and emotional.
- The development of communication on social media has greatly increased the opportunities to disseminate discriminatory content and hate speech, including antisemitism.

### **Integration**

- The integration of refugees from the Middle East (Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan) who reached the Netherlands in the 1990s has progressed relatively smoothly. Despite a long period of isolation from Dutch society and the labour market, by 2015 most of them had found a job and their children were performing well at school, especially those from Iran. Moreover, their political and cultural values do not differ fundamentally from those of the average Dutch.

- The integration process of the descendants of former labour migrants from Morocco and Turkey has taken more time but is also progressing. From about 2005, there has been a significant improvement in the educational achievement of the second generation. In respect of religion, some children of former guest workers have become more interested in Islam, but this does not influence their labour market position, nor does it lead to oppositional behaviour pertaining to core values of Dutch society.
- Only 8% of the 1 million Muslims in the Netherlands are attracted by the orthodox and conservative influence of Islamist Salafist sects.
- Since around 2007, the state no longer considers itself to be fully responsible for the integration of immigrants and their descendants and stresses that migrants themselves are responsible for their societal position.

### **State and civil society monitoring and responses**

- Since 2010, the government has been making an effort to improve and streamline reporting on discrimination and to develop anti-discrimination policies to counter antisemitism, Islamophobia and anti-black racism.
- In addition to general policies, specific measures for combatting different forms of discrimination have also been introduced. These include interreligious and intercultural dialogue and projects that aim to introduce young people and adults with a Muslim background to Jews and Jewish life in the Netherlands.

### **Conclusions**

- There is no attestable impact of recent MENA refugees on recorded antisemitic attitudes and hate crime in the Netherlands since 2011.
- There have been no significant changes in the scale or character of antisemitism since 2011. Fluctuations in the number and vehemence of antisemitic incidents can, however, be related to Israeli military operations.
- There is evidence which suggests that extreme right-wing activism against immigration and immigrants may lead to expressions of antisemitism.
- Some Jews in the Netherlands are concerned about the large-scale immigration of people who may harbour antisemitic or jihadist opinions and intentions. Fears about antisemitism among refugees stem from several factors: the fact that Dutch citizens with a Muslim background (so-called second-generation migrants from Morocco or Turkey) are involved in antisemitic incidents; the concern that radicalized Muslims in Europe or terrorists going to or returning from the Middle East may conduct antisemitic terrorist attacks; and a perceived lack of awareness and action on the issues of antisemitism and the integration of immigrants in society. With the fall in numbers of refugee arrivals since 2016 the issue seems to have lost some of its urgency.
- Jews are involved in a considerable number of initiatives and activities to bring refugees into contact with Jews, including having refugees temporarily staying in their homes. So far these interactions have revealed that refugees from Syria may have negative views of Israel and Jews, but such views have not manifested themselves in openly hostile behaviour or prevented friendly contact between Jews and Syrian (or other) refugees.

## Recommendations

### Policy

- Since 2000, Western Europe has witnessed numerous projects and initiatives aimed at countering antisemitism. Some of these have also been studied or evaluated. Knowledge of effective methods and best practices is not always used in new or existing activities. The financial arrangements for such activities, which are often paid for on a project-basis through subsidies, do not encourage the ongoing development of initiatives. Structural financing, evaluation and development of existing programmes could improve their effectiveness.
- Given the diversity of types, motivations and perpetrators of antisemitism, the narrow focus on Muslims is unwarranted.

### Practice

- In debates on migration, Islam and antisemitism it is important to distinguish between refugees, immigrants, citizens with a migration background, Muslims and non-Western immigrants.
- The fear, insecurity and anguish felt by both Jews and Muslims (as well as other disadvantaged groups) should be taken seriously and dealt with in a way that stimulates solidarity, not victimhood or competition.
- In order to counter images and discourses of Muslim–Jewish animosity, activities such as meetings, dialogue and educational projects should be initiated, continued and highlighted not as exceptions but as the norm. Studies of how such projects work in practice, rather than in theory, would help improve such approaches.
- Experts argue that education around antisemitism should not focus on the Shoah, but instead on the history and present-day lives of Jews.

### Research

- Given that we cannot assume that refugees espouse the ideology of the sending country it would be interesting to examine how Syrian refugees reflect on their attitudes to citizenship and diversity, the way these have been influenced by Syrian official ideology, and how these attitudes change in their respective new home countries.

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#### Endnote

- 1 This research project uses the United Nations and World Bank definitions of MENA and, in addition, includes Afghanistan, Eritrea and Turkey.

Antisemitism and Immigration in Western Europe Today  
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The full set of research reports for this study is available to download:

Foundation EVZ: [www.stiftung-evz.de](http://www.stiftung-evz.de)

Pears Institute for the study of Antisemitism: [www.pearsinstitute.bbk.ac.uk](http://www.pearsinstitute.bbk.ac.uk)