

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

The case of the United Kingdom

David Feldman and Ben Gidley
Pears Institute for the study of Antisemitism,
Birkbeck, University of London

Preface

This summary is taken from the report, *Antisemitism and Immigration in Western Europe Today: is there a connection? The case of the United Kingdom*. 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 focussed specifically on MENA migrants,¹ in response to the intensity of this debate, and in accordance with the brief from Foundation EVZ. The central concern of this project has been to investigate whether the arrival of MENA migrants since 2011 has had an impact on antisemitic attitudes and behaviour in Western Europe. The project also considers whether government and civil society agencies have identified a problem of antisemitism among MENA migrants. This report deals with the case of the United Kingdom. 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

Jews constitute a small minority in Britain, numbering a quarter of a million. Increasingly, both Jews and non-Jews express apprehension and concern in the face of a perceived rise in antisemitism.

Britain today is a diverse society in both its religious and ethnic dimensions. This diversity is one outcome of immigration. The integration – or want of integration – among immigrants and subsequent British-born generations has been a recurrent point of controversy, debate and enquiry. In recent decades much of this debate has focused on Muslim minorities.

This is the context in which immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa are sometimes pinpointed as a source of particular risk to the Jewish population.

Findings

Immigration and demography

Over the last 25 years the number of immigrants in Britain has grown rapidly. The size of the foreign-born population more than doubled between 1993 to 2014, from about 3.8 million in 1993 (7% of the population) to over 8.3 million (13%) in 2014.

In the context of this report, it is important to note that MENA migrants have made only a small contribution to the growth of the immigrant population. Today, they compose just 7% of the foreign-born population living in Britain. The MENA population in the UK is heterogeneous and the people within this category exhibit different migration histories, dynamics, flows, characteristics and legal statuses. The main sending MENA countries are Turkey and Iran (with a female-skewed gender profile) and the Gulf states (with a male-skewed gender profile). Migrants from some MENA countries also figure prominently among applications for asylum.

Immigration has changed the ethnic and religious composition of the population. In 1945 Jews were the largest non-Christian minority in the country. Now the Jewish minority is one relatively small group, of approximately 250,000 people, in a multi-faith and multicultural society. Whereas the Jewish population in Britain is undergoing a slow decline in numbers, the Muslim population in England and Wales grew from 1.5 million in 2001 to 2.7 million in 2011. Muslims (mainly of Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin) now constitute the largest non-Christian religious group in the country.

Antisemitism: trends and fears

Attitudes to Jews in British society are broadly favourable. The most recent research proposes that 5% of the general population can be described as antisemites. The antisemitism which does exist is widely distributed. It cannot be attributed to religious, ethnic or political minorities. At the same time, some groups are more likely than others to carry antisemitic attitudes. These groups include Muslims and people who, at one time, supported the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP).

In contrast to the generally positive picture provided by attitudinal surveys, there has been a sustained rise in the number of antisemitic incidents recorded annually by the Community Security Trust (CST). In 2000 this figure stood

at 405 incidents and by 2016 it had reached 1,309. This increase has been most marked in recorded incidents involving 'abusive behaviour'. Police figures indicate a rising level of antisemitic hate crime since 2014. This occurred in the context of a steep rise in the broad category of hate crime in these years, from 42,434 in 2013/2014 to 62,518 in 2015/2016.

Several factors have contributed to the increased number of recorded antisemitic incidents. The total has risen, in part, as a result of a series of international and domestic events which have served to encourage offenders. Flashpoints of conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, such as Operation Cast Lead in 2009 and Operation Protective Edge in 2014, had this effect; the controversy over antisemitism in the Labour Party since 2015 may have had a similar influence. At the same time the rise in recorded antisemitic incidents also reflects greater efficiency in recording incidents and crimes, and a growing propensity to report them.

Reported incidents represent the tip of a proverbial iceberg. The Crime Survey of England and Wales suggests that the actual level of hate crime experienced is more than four times the number of recorded incidents. For this reason, it is difficult to determine whether recorded increases reflect a growing volume of incidents and crimes, whether more incidents and crimes are being reported or whether the increases reflect the influence of both these phenomena.

Nevertheless, it is possible to reach some significant conclusions.

- British Jews perceive antisemitism to be rising. At the same time, they are divided in their perception of how pervasive antisemitism is. In this regard, the most recent survey, undertaken by the European Agency for Fundamental Rights in 2012, preceded recent flashpoints and controversies. This survey found that approximately half of respondents believed antisemitism was 'a fairly big problem' or 'a very big problem' while the other half believed it was 'not a very big problem' or 'not a problem at all'. It is likely that perceptions of antisemitism have changed for the worse over the last six years.
- Within public debate some voices identify the problem of antisemitism with Muslim minorities.
- The development of social media has greatly increased the opportunities to broadcast antisemitic abuse.
- More antisemitic incidents are categorized by the CST as 'anti-social' than as 'political' in motivation.
- With the exception of the years 2009 and 2014, among antisemitic incidents that exhibit a political motivation it is those which emanate from the far right that have been the most numerous and have gradually increased in number.
- Incidents which exhibit a connection to anti-Israel and Islamist ideologies are generally in a minority and their occurrence fluctuates in line with trigger events in the Middle East.
- Conflict in the Middle East has a significant impact on Jews in the UK and leads them to feel less safe.
- There is no evidence to suggest that immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East contribute in any significant way to the rise in recorded antisemitic hate crime.

- MENA migrants figure in the qualitative evidence gathered for this report as potential victims rather than perpetrators of prejudice and hate crimes.

Integration

The anxiety sometimes expressed in the face of migration from North Africa and the Middle East emerges alongside concerns at the weakness of integration among Muslim minorities more broadly. In fact, the evidence on integration reveals a mixed picture.

Educational outcomes for minority ethnic and religious groups, including Muslims, converge over time with the White British majority. However, Muslim minorities experience disadvantage in other fields such as income, employment and rates of unemployment: 26% of the Muslim population live in the top 10% of deprived areas in the country.

Civic participation, respect for law and commitment to the society of settlement is high among Muslim minorities. These facets of integration, however, run alongside a sense of grievance and injustice in the face of unequal outcomes in the labour market and the economy.

Processes of integration into UK society unfold among the majority of second generation Muslims but a significant minority become alienated. This could provide fertile ground for politicized antisemitism.

State and civil society monitoring and responses

A series of initiatives to monitor and combat antisemitism in Great Britain have been driven forward by cooperation between government and other organizations, most notably the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Antisemitism and the CST. These provide an important basis for future work.

Neither state nor civil society organizations target MENA migrants as they seek to monitor and combat antisemitism. MENA migrants have not been identified by these organizations as a problematic group.

Conclusions

- Attitudes to Jews in the UK are largely positive.
- Since 2000, recorded antisemitic incidents and statistics for antisemitic hate crime have shown a rising trend. Spikes in recorded incidents have been related temporally to conflict in the Middle East. This association was broken, however, in 2016 when recorded antisemitic incidents reached a record level.
- Among those incidents that are categorized as politically motivated the greatest number stem from far-right sources. In comparison, few incidents show an Islamist motivation.
- The number of MENA migrants in the UK is small. The Annual Population Survey in 2015 estimated that the UK population stood at 64.2 million, of whom 599,000 are MENA migrants.
- The UK population of Muslims has grown significantly and is now the largest non-Christian religious group in the UK, the main ethnic groups being of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origins. Within public discourse there are concerns about antisemitism among UK Muslims. These concerns are easily projected on to MENA migrants.
- We draw the conclusion that the rise in recorded antisemitic incidents and crimes in the UK should not be linked to the arrival of MENA migrants.

Recommendations

Policy

- Policy responses and public discussion should reflect that antisemitism arises within society as a whole and not only among immigrant or religious minorities.
- Policy makers and civil society organizations should take account of the limitations and problems of interpretation presented by different survey methods and by statistics that seek to measure hate crime and antisemitic incidents. In doing so, they will be able to safeguard against both complacency and alarmism.
- Government should do more to promote the economic and social integration of Muslim minorities in ways that extend beyond the issue of 'security'.

Practice

- Current examples of good practice should be extended and built upon. These examples include the response of government to parliamentary investigations of antisemitism, the liaison between the CST, Tell Mama and the police, and the effort of a Syrian refugee organization to promote political discussion and democratic values.
- There is an urgent need in the UK for substantive interaction between Jews and Muslims to provide a counterweight to negative stereotypes and political discourses that generate mutual suspicion.
- All sectors of society have a duty to speak responsibly on issues around immigration, antisemitism and Islamophobia.

- Politicians, policy makers and journalists should promote a balanced, evidence-based discussion of the relationship between immigration and antisemitism.

Research

- We need a representative survey of attitudes among MENA migrants.
- We need to know more about the attitudes and ideologies that develop among alienated second-generation Muslim minorities.
- The data on antisemitic incidents demands attention:
 - Members of ethnic minorities are over-represented in the tally of incidents recorded. Should this be taken at face value or is it best explained by other factors?
 - The large number of incidents categorized as 'anti-social' requires investigation so we can better understand the motives and intentions of offenders.
- We need to examine attitudes to religious and ethnic difference among both Jews and Muslims.

Endnote

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

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

The full set of research reports for this study is available to download:

Foundation EVZ: www.stiftung-evz.de

Pears Institute for the study of Antisemitism: www.pearsinstitute.bbk.ac.uk