

ANTISEMITIC INCIDENTS IN BERLIN 2022 – KEY FINDINGS

Ein Bericht der Recherche- und Informationsstelle
Antisemitismus Berlin (RIAS Berlin)



INTRODUCTION

The Department for Research and Information on Antisemitism Berlin (RIAS Berlin) has learned of more than 6,000 prosecutable and non-prosecutable antisemitic incidents in the German capital since its founding in January 2015, and in particular since online reporting was made available at www.report-antisemitism.de/en in July of the same year. The project followed upon a qualitative, non-representative survey of Berlin Jews on their experiences and ways of dealing with antisemitism, which was conducted in the summer of 2014. A summary of the results was later published by RIAS Berlin under the title “Wir stehen allein da” (“We stand alone”).¹ This was because the respondents had consistently indicated that not only had they not experienced support in many situations, but that they did not even know where they could get professional support.

In addition to documenting and analysing antisemitic incidents, it is therefore crucial for RIAS Berlin to improve this situation where victims of antisemitism feel isolated. This includes not only receiving the reports, but also standing with the victims, as well as making these experiences visible to the non-Jewish majority society. The close cooperation with the Jewish Community in Berlin as well as with many other Jewish organizations and initiatives based in the city is, in addition to the multilingual approach, essential for the community’s growing trust in the project’s work.

Another factor of great importance for the successful establishment of the overall project approach was that the Verein für Demokratische Kultur in Berlin (VDK) e.V. (Society for a Democratic Culture in Berlin) had already conducted a mutual understanding process on the common frame of reference within Berlin’s civil society prior to the start of the project. The basis for this common understanding was the working definition of antisemitism of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC).² Thus, a version of the working definition of antisemitism adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance in May 2016 had been operationalized for the German context and for civic work by the start of the project.

Between 2017 and 2020, the project documented antisemitic incidents in Berlin under relatively constant conditions; among the sources of information were antisemitic crimes recorded by the Kriminalpolizeilicher Meldedienst (Criminal Police Reporting Service) of the Berlin State Police on Politically Motivated Crime, which accounted for between 20 % and 24 % of the total. Since 2021, this data has no longer been made available to the project.

1 Verein für demokratische Kultur in Berlin e.V./ Recherche- und Informationsstelle Antisemitismus Berlin: „Wir stehen alleine da.“ #EveryDayAntisemitismus sichtbar machen und Solidarität stärken. Neue Wege der Erfassung antisemitischer Vorfälle - Unterstützungsangebote für die Betroffenen, available online under https://report-antisemitism.de/documents/2016-07-18_rias-be_Broschuere_Wir-stehen-alleine-da.pdf [last accessed on 31.03.2022].

2 In 2007, the EUMC was replaced by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA).

From 2017 up to and including 2022, the project documented a total of 5,845 antisemitic incidents in Berlin. These include 3 cases of extreme violence, 157 assaults, 240 acts of targeted damage of property, and 237 threats. During that period, the project counted 1,758 individuals impacted by antisemitic incidents.³ Of the victims, 67 % were Jewish/Israeli or addressed as such.

Three key findings can be noted for the 2015–2022 period.

1. The number of antisemitic incidents in Berlin that have come to the attention of the project is not increasing constantly. In 2017, RIAS Berlin recorded a total of 955 antisemitic incidents. The number increased to 1,085 incidents in 2018 and decreased again to 881 incidents in 2019. It then rose to 1,004 incidents in 2020, rose further to 1,052 incidents in 2021, and fell again to 848 antisemitic incidents in 2022. The figures show that, for all the fluctuations, the number of antisemitic incidents is continuously high. On average, two to three antisemitic incidents occur daily. This includes all types of incidents, with low-threshold incidents making up the vast majority.

In addition, RIAS Berlin regularly observes antisemitic dynamics: temporary phases in which an increased number of antisemitic incidents with similar context are registered and documented by the project. Occasions such as political events, historical anniversaries or public debates sometimes form structures of opportunity for antisemitic statements and actions. Examples of such structures of opportunity in recent years have included the escalation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in 2021, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic and government interventions aimed at containing it.

2. Antisemitism is a multifaceted phenomenon that involves society as a whole. Antisemitic incidents not only occur along all political and ideological spectrums covered by RIAS Berlin; the various manifestations of antisemitism occur across these spectrums. Antisemitic trivializations of the Shoah and reversals of the roles of perpetrators and victims can be found in all political and ideological milieus, including political centrists. The same applies to antisemitic conspiracy myths and forms of Israel-related antisemitism. Antisemitism thus sometimes functions as a unifying element between different political milieus that are otherwise not close to each other in any way.

³ However, this figure does not indicate whether any of the individuals counted were victims of multiple antisemitic incidents. Also, no later reports are taken into account.

3. After nine years of project work, we must acknowledge the depressing fact that antisemitism is an everyday phenomenon for Jews in Berlin. Antisemitism is encountered by Jews in Berlin in a variety of forms and contexts: as assaults, threats, targeted damage of property or abusive behaviour, whether online or face to face. The persons reporting their experiences to RIAS Berlin describe antisemitic incidents in the workplace, around synagogues and Jewish communities, at school, among their friends and in the course of random encounters in public spaces or on public transport. In many cases, those who spoke or acted in an antisemitic way took Jewish or Israeli symbols or signs as a reason to insult or attack the victims – in many cases, the perpetrators' behaviour turned hostile and aggressive very suddenly. The conclusion is that there are few spaces in Berlin where recognisably Jewish people can be sure not to be faced with antisemitism. The fact that antisemitism is an everyday occurrence for Jews in Berlin does not mean that they experience antisemitism on a daily basis. It does mean, however, that they have to make a trade-off between their Jewish identity and their physical and psychological safety in their everyday behaviour.

Thanks to the continuous funding from the state programme "Democracy. Diversity. Respect. – Against right-wing extremism, racism and antisemitism" ("Demokratie, Vielfalt. Respekt. Gegen Rechtsextremismus, Rassismus und Antisemitismus") of the State Office for Equal Treatment - Against Discrimination as well as from the Amadeu Antonio Foundation, RIAS Berlin has been able to successfully establish itself and to make an impact. Since 2020, in addition to the reporting office, OFEK BERLIN (a Jewish counselling centre for victims of antisemitism) has also received funding. Regishut, a project of VDK e. V. focusing on sensitising the Berlin police to the perspectives of victims and current expressions of antisemitism, has been running since 2021. By now, RIAS Berlin's exemplary project approach is being supported in ten other federal states. The Federal Association RIAS e. V., founded in 2018, ensures quality assurance and the continued development of the work through nationwide exchange.

OVERVIEW: ANTISEMITIC INCIDENTS IN BERLIN 2022

The Department for Research and Information on Antisemitism Berlin documented a total of 848 antisemitic incidents in 2022. RIAS Berlin recorded one incident of extreme violence, 21 assaults, 31 acts of targeted damage of property, 24 threats, 751 cases of abusive behaviour (including 36 gatherings) and 20 mass mailings. Thus, RIAS Berlin became aware of almost 20 % fewer antisemitic incidents in Berlin in 2022 than in 2021. However, this does not hold equally for all types of incidents. Although fewer incidents were reported to RIAS Berlin overall than in 2021, physical antisemitic attacks as well as antisemitic threats and targeted damage of property remained at the same level as in 2021. On average, slightly over two antisemitic incidents occurred in the federal capital every day. Two incidents per week were directed against Jews, Israelis or persons addressed as such.

Steady number of extreme violence and antisemitic assaults

On 16 November 2022, an incident of extreme violence occurred in the Spandau district. Two persons were attacked by a group of young adults. They accused the two brothers of shouting "Free Israel". The group then attacked the two, chasing them through the park, hitting them and injuring one of them so badly that he had to be hospitalised with a broken nose and a concussion. The perpetrators only desisted after passers-by became aware of the incident.

The incident is reminiscent of one of the two cases of extreme violence that came to the attention of the project in 2021: On 25 October, a man in Spandau had refused to shout "Free Palestine" when told to do so by a group of three people, and was then injured so severely that he had to be hospitalised.

Further physical antisemitic assaults occurred in nine of Berlin's twelve districts in 2022. In total, the project became aware of 21 such incidents. These incidents involved sudden assaults in the S-Bahn or U-Bahn trains or being spat at in the street. In twelve cases, the persons affected were Jewish or were addressed as such. The antisemitic character of the acts was made clear by the fact that in these cases the perpetrators took Jewish symbols or Hebrew speech as a reason to attack the victims.

Antisemitic incidents related to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine in 2022

In 2022, the project became aware of 76 incidents that had a connection to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine; this represents nearly 9 % of the documented incidents. RIAS Berlin also registered incidents in which specific behaviour was expected from Jews or Israel due to the Shoah: online comments and letters to Jewish or Israeli organisations often accused them of insufficient support for Ukraine. In other cases, conversely, they criticised an unsupportive attitude towards Russia. Especially in March, when the media commented critically on Israel's lack of participation in the sanctions against Russia, many incidents (27) exhibited such a connection. Most of these antisemitic online messages were attributed to political centrists.

COVID-19 pandemic no longer serves as a structure of opportunity for antisemitic incidents

In 2022, RIAS Berlin still documented 141 antisemitic incidents related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the governmental measures to contain it. However, 75 % of those incidents occurred in the first three months of the year, at a time when compulsory vaccination was still being debated. After that, there were on average less than four incidents per month until the end of the year relating to the pandemic. From March 2020 onwards, RIAS Berlin recorded the COVID-19 pandemic as a structure of opportunity for antisemitic incidents; however, March 2022 marks the end of this structure of opportunity, which lasted for two years, due to the significant decline in the frequency of incidents related to it. However, the boundaries of what can be said seem to have shifted and trivialisations of the Shoah and antisemitic self-victimisations have become increasingly normalised in the context of the pandemic.

More than half of antisemitic incidents occurring online

In 2022, most of the reported antisemitic incidents (57 %) occurred online. The most frequent victims of antisemitic harassment on the internet were Jewish and Israeli institutions (406 incidents). These incidents mainly involved antisemitic comments on social media platforms and antisemitic e-mails addressed to Jewish and Israeli institutions or individuals. For example, on 6 March, a Jewish user who tweeted about the Russian war of aggression on Ukraine received comments spreading antisemitic conspiracy myths about the Jewish president of Ukraine; in other comments, Israeli Jews were equated with Nazis.

Antisemitism mostly manifests itself as antisemitic othering or post-Shoah antisemitism

In 48 % of the incidents in Berlin, antisemitism manifested itself as antisemitic othering. In almost half of the incidents, Jews were referred to as foreign or as not belonging, or the term "Jew" was used as a swearword. Post-Shoah antisemitism also continues to be a formative expression of antisemitism in Berlin. Thus, like in previous years, almost half of all incidents (47 %) in 2022 made antisemitic references to the Shoah, trivialised it or reversed the roles of perpetrators and victims.

Less than half of the incidents can be attributed to a political and ideological background

As in previous years, the majority of antisemitic incidents documented in Berlin (54 %) could not be assigned a distinct political and ideological background. 15 % of the incidents, and thus a majority of those incidents in which an attribution was possible, came from the extreme right/populist right spectrum (128 incidents).

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Department for Research and Information on Antisemitism Berlin (RIAS Berlin) was established in January 2015 by the Society for Democratic Culture in Berlin (VDK). It is funded by the Berlin State Programme against right-wing extremism, racism and anti-Semitism of the Senate Department for Justice, Consumer Protection and Anti-Discrimination and by the Amadeu Antonio Foundation.

RIAS Berlin conducts a civil society rooted recording of antisemitic incidents based on the IHRA working definition of Antisemitism and offers support to those affected.

RIAS Berlin is a member of the federal working group of the Federal Association RIAS e. V.

RIAS Berlin

Department for Research and Information on Antisemitism Berlin

You can report your experiences and observations of antisemitic incidents at any time via www.report-antisemitism.de.

Gleimstr. 31, 10437 Berlin
phone 030 817 985 818

facebook.com/AntisemitismusRechercheBerlin
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