

## 7 Attitudes towards Hungarian Jewry and its relations with non-Jews

### Attitudes towards Hungarian Jewry

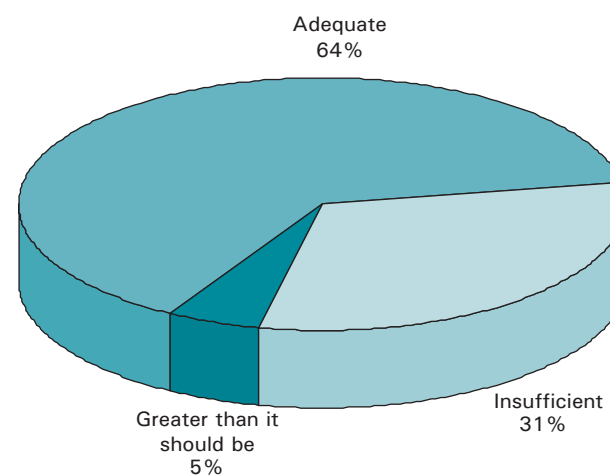
The survey set out to examine attitudes towards two different aspects of the situation of the Jewish population of Hungary: first, its socio-political influence and overall standards of living; and, second, its perception of the level of antisemitism and anti-Jewish prejudice.

Answers to questions regarding Jewish social and political influence in the Hungarian national context revealed that 64 per cent of respondents regarded it as adequate and 31 per cent as insufficient, while 5 per cent thought that Jews had more influence than they should have. With regard to standards of living, about two-thirds (65 per cent) of the participants thought that Hungary's Jews had a standard of living similar to that of non-Jews, whereas about a quarter (28 per cent) thought that their standard of living was higher and only 3 per cent thought that Hungarian Jews were less well off than other citizens.

### Attitudes towards antisemitism

The survey asked a series of questions designed to determine how Jews perceived the extent of antisemitism in Hungary. The responses can be divided into three more or less equal groups of viewpoints, as shown in Table 24. About a third (32 per cent) of respondents perceived little antisemitism in contemporary Hungary; just over a third (37 per cent) thought that there was a high level of antisemitism, and around a third (31 per cent) thought that there was neither a high nor a low level of antisemitism. Compared with older respondents, a higher proportion of the younger age

Figure 9: Extent of political and social influence of Hungarian Jewry



groups (especially those under 35) thought that antisemitism was not very significant in Hungary.

Importantly, however, when respondents were asked to evaluate the size of groups holding anti-Jewish attitudes, the resulting data contradicted the findings noted in Table 24. The data are shown in Table 25.

With regard to these data, if estimates of 0–10 per cent are, somewhat arbitrarily, taken to represent a 'low level' of perceived animosity, then the findings show that 38 per cent of respondents believed that there was no, or only slight, anti-Jewish feeling in Hungary. This compares with the 32 per cent in Table 24 who felt that the level of antisemitism was

Table 24: Perceived level of antisemitism, by age group (%)

Level	Under 35	35-54	55-69	70+	Full sample
Low	39	33	32	27	32
Medium	28	31	29	35	31
High	33	36	39	38	37
Total	100	100	100	100	100
N	407	602	403	560	1,972

low. The proportion of those who felt that 11–30 per cent of all Hungarians were predisposed against Jews was almost the same as the proportion who felt that there was a ‘medium degree’ of animosity. The data go on to show that 28 per cent of respondents felt that at least 1 in 3 people viewed Jews negatively, a significantly lower figure than the 37 per cent in Table 24 who declared that they perceived a ‘high level’ of antisemitism in the country. Several recent sociological surveys carried out in Hungary (in 1994, 1995, 1996 and 2002) have shown that about 25 per cent of the adult population of Hungary harbours antisemitic feelings, and about a third of this group (8–10 per cent of the total population) hold extreme antisemitic prejudices. This means that only about 1 in 6 of the respondents succeeded in gauging accurately the extent of antisemitic prejudice in Hungary.<sup>10</sup>

Table 25: Assessment of Hungarian anti-Jewish feeling

What percentage of people have an aversion towards Jews?	Answers (%)
0	11
1-10	26
11-20	17
21-30	18
31-50	17
Over 50	11
Total (N = 1,845)	100

In response to questions asking whether people believed that there had been an increase or decrease in antisemitism in Hungary ‘in the recent past’, nearly two-thirds (63 per cent) said they thought that antisemitism had increased (Table 26). Opinions on this issue vary widely. Overall, the proportion of those who sensed an increase of antisemitism was 10 times higher than that of those who thought it had decreased. This difference was evident across all age groups, with the greatest difference observed in the 55–69 age cohort.

Regarding the results of an attempt to identify how respondents formed these opinions, it appears that their attitudes towards the intensity and range of antisemitism in Hungary were based primarily on media reports rather than on personal experience of any antisemitic incident. When we asked whether respondents ‘had been personally offended or harmed as a Jew’, 82 per cent said ‘no’. Those who claimed to have been offended generally categorized the incident as malicious remarks heard in a public place, such as on the street.

Respondents seemed to be generally optimistic about the future. Just over half (52 per cent) thought that current levels of antisemitism would not change in the next decade whereas the other half thought there would be some change; among this latter half, twice as many thought that the change would be for the worse (32 per cent) as opposed to the better (16 per cent) (Table 27). These findings show that about half the number of respondents who thought that antisemitism has increased in the recent past (63 per cent) thought

Table 26: Recent perceived increase/decrease in Hungarian antisemitism, by age group (%)

Perceived change	Under 35	35-54	55-69	70+	Full sample
Decreased	10	5	4	6	6
Has not changed	32	28	30	33	31
Increased	58	67	66	61	63
Total	100	100	100	100	100
N	408	604	407	569	1,988

<sup>10</sup> See András Kovács, *Antisemitic Prejudices in Contemporary Hungary*, Analysis of Current Trends in Antisemitism (ACTA) no. 16 (Jerusalem: Vidal Sasson International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem 1999).

Table 27: Expected level of antisemitism in the next decade, by age group (%)

Expected change	Under 35	35-54	55-69	70+	Full sample
Decrease	18	14	16	15	16
Remain the same	47	51	51	58	52
Increase	35	35	33	27	32
Total	100	100	100	100	100
N	398	576	386	536	1,896

Table 28: Likelihood of Jewish persecution, by age group (%)

Likelihood	Under 35	35-54	55-69	70+	Full sample
Unlikely	32	29	32	32	31
Possible but not likely	65	66	65	65	65
Likely	3	5	3	3	4
Total	100	100	100	100	100
N	408	598	399	553	1,958

that it would increase in the future (Table 26). Opinions were not significantly influenced by age.

The data in Table 28 offer a further view on respondents' expectations regarding antisemitism in the future. Most respondents thought the prospect of an outbreak of violent antisemitism was an improbable one. Only 4 per cent of respondents felt that there was a real chance that there would be 'persecution' of Jews in the coming decade. One-third thought this was absolutely impossible. Almost two-thirds thought that some kind of anti-Jewish violence might occur but that it was not very likely. The age

of the respondent did not significantly colour the responses.

On the issue of combating antisemitism, despite the fact that the proportion of those who thought that there was a good chance of anti-Jewish acts in the near future was very low, the vast majority (85 per cent) thought that antisemitic hate speech should be thoroughly controlled. (In 2003, 60 per cent of the total Hungarian adult population held the same view.<sup>11</sup>) Age groups differed a great deal in this respect (Table 29). There were particularly divergent views between those aged over 55 (and

Table 29: Attitudes to the control of the open expression of antisemitic views, by age group (%)

Level of control	Under 35	35-54	55-69	70+	Full sample
Should be controlled	81	80	88	92	85
Controlled within limits	2	2	2	0	2
Should not be controlled	17	18	10	8	13
Total	100	100	100	100	100
N	395	576	393	556	1,920

11 Results of a survey carried out by the Szonda-Ipsos Institute, Budapest in October 2003 on a national sample of 1,000 persons.

especially those over 75) and the younger groups. Among the oldest age group, 92 per cent thought that overt expressions of anti-Jewish views should not be permitted. This figure was more than 10 percentage points higher than among the under-55 age group. Likewise, while as few as 8 per cent of the older groups said that overt expressions of antisemitic views should be permitted, one-fifth of the under-55 age group thought so.

### Attitudes towards the Holocaust

Since awareness of the Holocaust and the need to remember it are so important in contributing to a sense of Jewish identity among Hungarian Jews (see Table 18), it was particularly important to determine how Jews actually viewed the Holocaust, its meaning and its lessons for Jews and non-Jews today. Respondents were presented with a set of statements regarding the significance of the Holocaust and the way it is viewed today. They were asked to register agreement or disagreement with each statement on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 showing the strongest agreement.

The data indicate that 53 per cent of respondents agreed that the Holocaust should be a major focus of Jewish self-awareness whereas only a minority (15 per cent) thought that there was no point in discussing the Holocaust any longer. In this respect, comparative data from general surveys show that

there is a significant difference between Jews and non-Jews. Indeed, as the results of a 1995 survey showed, 66 per cent of Budapest's non-Jewish population with at least a secondary school diploma thought that the issue of the Holocaust should be 'removed from the agenda'.<sup>12</sup>

The area of greatest consensus among the sample was in responses to questions about Jewish entitlement to material compensation. Eighty per cent of respondents thought that compensation was justified whereas in 1995 only 36 per cent and, in 2003, 49 per cent of the educated Budapest non-Jewish group thought that Jews had a legal right to compensation from the state.

The majority of the Jewish sample thought that differences of opinion (over compensation and the importance of remembering the Holocaust) did not create irresolvable conflicts between Jews and non-Jews with regard to Holocaust denial. As the 1995 survey showed, more than two-thirds of the non-Jewish population believed that Holocaust denial should be outlawed. In 2003 the proportion of Hungarians who were inclined to support legal sanctions against Holocaust deniers was about 50 per cent of the total adult population, somewhat lower than that of the Jewish sample. The results of the 2003 survey indicate that, though open antisemitism is condemned by the majority, a

Table 30: Significance of the Holocaust for the present (%)\*

Statement	Agree		Disagree		Average score
	%	N	%	N	
Holocaust survivors are entitled to compensation from the Hungarian state.	80	1,616	5	147	4.41
Persons denying that the Holocaust took place should be sanctioned by law.	59	1,199	26	522	3.67
The Holocaust should be at the heart of Jewish self-awareness.	53	1,077	24	479	3.57
Frequent references to the Holocaust can obstruct relations between Jews and non-Jews.	25	506	53	1,051	2.43
As so many years have passed since the Holocaust, the subject should be removed from the agenda.	15	303	73	1,475	1.88

\*Scores on a scale of 1–5: 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree

12 See András Kovács, 'The Holocaust, the persecution of Jews and historical responsibility: findings of a survey in Hungary', *East European Jewish Affairs*, vol. 28, no. 1, summer 1998, 66. The proportion for the total Budapest population was 75 per cent.

substantial group of Hungarians (43 per cent of the respondents) preferred an end to the debate on wartime persecutions and responsibility, and thought that the issue of the Holocaust should be laid to rest.

**Attitudes towards assimilation**

The survey sought to determine both the degree of Jewish assimilation and attitudes towards it. Specifically, did respondents feel that Jews in Hungary already had a place in mainstream society as Jews or that they should take steps towards further integration? The responses showed a wide variety of

sharply differing and even contradictory opinions on these and related issues.

There was a substantial number of respondents who favoured assimilation, and thought that a greater effort was required on the part of Jews themselves to integrate into mainstream society, for example by sanctioning mixed marriages between Jews and non-Jews (70 per cent). On the other hand, 3 respondents in 5 saw no need for further integration, and a third of the sample considered total assimilation to be impossible.

Table 31: Attitudes towards assimilation in mainstream society and mixed marriages

Statement	Agree to some extent		Disagree to some extent	
	%	N	%	N
Marriages between Jews and non-Jews should be avoided as far as possible.	20	393	70	1,416
Jews should more actively pursue ways of becoming integrated in Hungarian society.	26	520	59	520
Because of the persecution they have suffered, Jews are no longer able to become integrated in Hungarian society.	33	668	53	1,067
More mixed marriages between Jews and non-Jews would be desirable.	32	643	45	913

