

9 Summary

Some of the findings of this survey of contemporary Hungarian Jewry are, perhaps, predictable given the modern social history of Hungarian Jews and the consequences of the Holocaust in Hungary. However, the research findings also reveal phenomena that reflect specific developments of the post-war years. These may be summarized briefly as follows.

Somewhere between 0.8 and 1.5 per cent of Hungary's present-day population are the offspring of at least one Jewish parent. The average age of the group is high in relation to the general population. One reason for this is the cohort-specific consequence of the Holocaust: first, the small size of the generation born prior to 1944 and, second, emigration after 1945. Another reason is that, on average, Jews live longer than the general population. Due to the age composition of the Jewish population and a relatively low birth-rate, which reflects a general trend in Hungary, the size of the Hungarian Jewish population is likely to continue to decline.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, more than 15 per cent of Hungary's Jewish population lived in Budapest, and Jews comprised more than 20 per cent of the city's total population. During the Holocaust, almost all of Hungary's Jewish population outside the capital lost their lives, while most Jews in Budapest survived. Today, 90 per cent of Hungary's Jews reside in Budapest, reaffirming the historical trend, and they account for about 5 per cent of the capital's total population. In terms of their geographical distribution, relatively large numbers of Jews reside in high-status neighbourhoods, reflecting the economic and social status of the group; in contrast, Jews are also numerous in districts of Budapest that have been traditionally inhabited by Jews. A new phenomenon is the return of small groups of Jews to Hungary's provincial towns and cities, a process that may be explained by economic developments since 1990 and the rapid expansion of universities in the provincial cities.

Contemporary Hungarian Jewry is a high-status group in Hungarian society. One reason for this is that the Jewish population is highly educated. Compared with the population at large, Jews have traditionally attained very high educational qualifications, a trend maintained in the decades after the Holocaust. Forty-five per cent of today's Jewish population hold

university or college degrees, a proportion some 20 per cent higher than that for the general population of Budapest. Analysis of educational qualifications by age group allows us to refine our observations further. The number of university or college graduates began to increase rapidly in the immediate post-war years, peaking among those currently aged between 35 and 54 (72 per cent). This was partly the consequence of a delayed realization of the desire for the education and social mobility that had been unachievable during the years of discrimination and persecution, a kind of compensatory mobility. However, it was also the realization of the potential of a population group that has traditionally placed great value on education and knowledge. This trend appears to have broken down in the young generation: just 30 per cent of the under-35s have higher education qualifications than the general population, a performance figure much lower than that for the previous generation, even when those who are currently students (9 per cent) are taken into account. It appears that developments since 1990—in particular the formation of a capitalist market economy—have altered the career paths of younger people. The attractiveness of professions requiring higher education has declined in favour of careers, such as running a business enterprise, that require no such qualifications but do not represent a decline in economic status.

The employment structure and consumption level of the Jewish population reflects that of a highly educated group and most Jews can be located in the upper-middle sector of Hungarian society. Nevertheless, the population of older Jews includes several subgroups that face significant social problems. Analysis of the demographic data reveals a relatively large group of elderly women living alone with a relatively deprived economic status.

The findings show that roughly three-quarters of the Jewish population are from religiously and ethnically homogeneous families, having four Jewish grandparents. Analysed by age group, however, the picture is much more differentiated and indicates a breakdown of the homogeneous family background. Whereas 84 per cent of those aged 56 or over have homogeneous family backgrounds, this ratio falls to just 40 per cent among the under-35s. Underlying this trend is the dramatic increase in the rate of

exogamous marriage since the Second World War. On the other hand, the data also indicate that, from the mid-1950s, the rate of out-marriage stabilized at approximately 50 per cent. As in other countries, the propensity to out-marry is greater among Hungarian men than among women.

The survey of the level of religiosity and the observance of Jewish religious and cultural traditions shows that the contemporary Hungarian Jewish population is highly secularized; the strength of religious belief among Jews is lower than among non-Jewish Hungarians. The process of detachment from religious orthodoxy began among Hungarian Jews after the emancipation and, by 1910, 41 per cent of Jews belonged to non-Orthodox (Neolog) communities. This process was reinforced by the almost complete destruction during the Holocaust of the more observant Jewish population in the provinces, with the vast majority of survivors being from Budapest, which was clearly more secularized than the rest of the country. The Communist authorities' subsequent anti-religious policies reinforced this trend.

For all these reasons, it is no surprise to find that the population surveyed exhibits little interest in religious and cultural traditions. According to our data, around 8–10 per cent of the sample may be considered 'traditionally minded' Jews, while about a quarter state that they do have some contact with Jewish religious institutions. In reality, however, it is likely that this group's share of the total Jewish population is smaller (for the causes of the distortion, see Appendix 1). Nevertheless, there are clear signs that some of the under-35s have begun to re-embrace Jewish tradition and religiosity.

Data relating to both religious belief and practice indicate that, in Hungary, religious and cultural identity do not lie at the centre of a sense of Jewishness. Instead, the central element of identity appears to be a historical memory of persecution and of Jewish forebears. Fifteen per cent of respondents state that they have a strong Jewish identity, while a third describe their Jewish identity as weak or almost non-existent. Most respondents have a dual identity, with Jewish and Hungarian elements existing in tandem. Irrespective of changes in the political make-up of the country, this trend reflects policies followed and supported by Jewish institutions and the Hungarian state ever since emancipation, with the exception of the era of discrimination and persecution. Almost

two-thirds of respondents are satisfied with the community's level of integration and consider it unnecessary for Jews to make further efforts towards social integration. Indeed, a relatively large subgroup of the population is opposed to further assimilation: a fifth of respondents consider it better to avoid further marriages between Jews and non-Jews.

Three-quarters of the respondents demonstrate a strong emotional identification with Israel. The Jewish state is important to them, they are proud of it, and they feel that the existence of Israel represents security for Jews. However, this attachment is mostly emotional and the group was considerably more divided when it came to expressing views on whether or not they accepted the Zionist position on the significance of Israel for the diaspora. More than half the respondents and about two-thirds of university graduates do not agree that Israel is 'the real home of the Jews', and even fewer indicate that they have considered emigrating to Israel.

Regarding the relationship between Jews and non-Jews, the findings of the survey indicate that a large majority of Jews in Hungary (64 per cent) are satisfied with the level of social and political influence of Jews, and do not feel that Jews are subject to greater disadvantages in the economic field than are non-Jews. Nevertheless, almost two-thirds of respondents feel that antisemitism has increased considerably in recent decades, and a third fear that this trend will continue. The responses show that this perception of antisemitism is not related to incidents of discrimination or violence since the number of violent acts against Jewish individuals and institutions motivated by antisemitism has been negligible in Hungary over the past decade. The fear stems from the appearance of traditional and 'new' antisemitic views, in both the media and in public political discourse, which, thanks to the right to freedom of speech, may now be openly expressed. A majority of Jews would like to see a change in this situation: 85 per cent consider it acceptable to place legal restrictions on the public expression of antisemitic views, while 59 per cent support such sanctions against Holocaust deniers.

In terms of economic, social and ideological attitudes, statistical analysis shows that a majority of respondents hold liberal views. They believe in the capitalist market economy and support liberal positions on social issues that traditionally separate liberal and conservative standpoints, such as abortion

and the refugee issue. At the same time, there are also two more conservative-minded groups, one of which is a product of the Communist regime that ruled Hungary for almost four decades. This group is anti-capitalist and traditionally leftist, and is the most distant from all forms of Jewish tradition and Jewish

identity. The other conservative group comprises mainly traditionally religious Jews. Overall, in terms of its attitudes and probably its party political preferences, contemporary Hungarian Jewry is located on the liberal-left wing of the Hungarian political spectrum.

