

EU action against anti-Semitism and Islamophobia

Recent years have witnessed growing trends of anti-Semitism as well as a sharp increase in incidents and attacks directed towards members of the Muslim community. Attacks against Jewish communities in Toulouse, Brussels, Paris and Copenhagen, and verbal and physical violence against Muslim communities have shown the need for additional measures.

Background

Although anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim attitudes are separate phenomena with different backgrounds, different causes and symptoms and different manifestations of violence, they both represent hatred and hostility towards a particular community. It is [suggested](#) that anti-Semitism and Islamophobia may be directed towards religion as a whole (Islam being considered as violent and backward, and Judaism anti-modern and exclusivist), towards individuals who are attributed negative characteristics, towards Jewish and Muslim cultures (food, family law, lack of civility) or towards collective identity through political representation (states and organisations). Discrimination and persecution of Christians and other religions is less common in Europe, but nonetheless remains a problem in many [parts of the world](#).

Root causes and trends

Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia both have deep roots in history, but are on the rise because of more recent political and economic influences.

Root causes

Centuries ago, Jews were persecuted as a religious minority, while last century the belief that Jews were enemies and a threat to the state was the driving force behind the Holocaust. Today Jews are targeted mainly because of events in the Middle East, although some anti-Semitic sentiments also revolve around the Holocaust. According to a [report](#) by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the main perpetrators of anti-Semitic incidents are neo-Nazis, far-right or far-left sympathisers, Muslim fundamentalists and the younger generation. The report states that anti-Semitic behaviour is mainly characterised by denial and trivialisation of the Holocaust, glorification of the Nazi past, anti-Semitic sentiment due to property restitution laws and hatred because of Israeli policies. It includes verbal and physical violence; threats; insults of Jews going to synagogues; harassment of rabbis; repeated attacks on Jews wearing symbols of their religion; hate speech; anti-Semitic bullying in schools; and damage to property, including arson.

Throughout [history](#), Muslims have been targeted by non-Muslim groups. According to an OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) [report](#), recent anti-Muslim rhetoric often associates Muslims with terrorism and extremism under the pretext of the 'war on terror'. Muslims are considered a threat to national identity and a group whose culture is incompatible with human rights and democracy. The report also suggests that the incidence of anti-Muslim hate crimes and incidents increases following terrorist attacks, and on the anniversaries of such attacks. This most commonly includes attacks against mosques, community centres and Muslim families' homes, as well as attacks against women wearing headscarves.

Trends

According to a FRA [survey](#) which collected personal experiences and perceptions of self-identified Jewish respondents in eight EU Member States, two thirds (66%) of those respondents in 2013 considered anti-Semitism to be a problem across the Member States surveyed, while 76% of them believed that anti-Semitism has increased over the past five years in the country in which they live. Besides, 73% reported that anti-Semitism has increased online over the same period. In the 12 months preceding the survey, 21% of respondents experienced an incident or incidents involving verbal insult or harassment, or a physical attack because they were Jewish. Despite gaps in data collection and high levels of under-reporting, a [report](#) by the

International Network Against Cyber Hate and the *Ligue Internationale contre le Racisme et l'Antisémitisme* from November 2014 shows that the number of recorded physical, verbal and internet-based anti-Semitic incidents rose in 10 EU Member States following Israel's attack on Gaza in summer 2014. Anti-Muslim incidents increased as well, especially following the Paris attacks on *Charlie Hebdo* and a Jewish supermarket in January 2015. The [French Observatory on Islamophobia](#) recorded 222 anti-Muslim acts in the first quarter of 2015, which represents a 500% increase compared to 37 in the same period in 2014. The organisation recorded 178 anti-Muslim acts in January 2015 alone as a consequence of that attack, which is more than the number recorded for the whole of 2014 (133). Moreover, [Eurobarometer](#) findings of October 2015 show that Muslims are faced with the lowest levels of social acceptance among all religious groups. Just 61% of respondents would be totally comfortable with a colleague at work being Muslim, and only 43% comfortable if their adult child had a relationship with a Muslim person. Some groups in EU Member States seek to link the terrorist attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015 and the recent migration flows, with the aim of inciting prejudice against all migrants coming to the EU, mostly from Muslim-majority countries, such as Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.

EU action

Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia represent a threat to the values and principles upon which the EU is founded. Therefore the EU has adopted measures to combat different forms of racism and xenophobia, such as hate crime and hate speech, discrimination and intolerance. The [Framework Decision](#) on combatting racism and xenophobia obliges Member States to penalise public incitement to racist violence or hatred (hate speech), and consider racist or xenophobic motivation behind all crimes (hate crime) as an aggravating circumstance. The decision also includes provision for making denial of the Holocaust a criminal offence. So far only 13 Member States have fully implemented this provision in national law. The EU [Directive on the Rights of victims of crime](#), which Member States had to transpose by 16 November 2015, refers explicitly to victims of hate crime, their protection and specific needs.

As an additional measure to fight hate speech in the media, the [Audiovisual Media Services Directive](#) states that Member States shall ensure that audiovisual media services provided by media service providers under their jurisdiction do not contain any incitement to hatred based on race, sex, religion or nationality. Equally, under the [Directive on Electronic Commerce](#) Member States may take measures to derogate from freedom to provide information society services for reasons of the fight against any incitement to hatred on grounds of race, sex, religion or nationality.

Discrimination on the basis of religion is currently forbidden in the field of employment under the [Employment Equality Directive](#). A comprehensive legal framework to address discrimination on the grounds of religion and belief beyond employment (Equal Treatment Directive), which would include areas such as social protection, education and access to goods and services, is currently being discussed by the Council of the EU.

As a recent measure to combat all forms of racism, hatred and intolerance, the European Commission [appointed two coordinators](#) on 1 December 2015: Katharina von Schnurbein for anti-Semitism and David Friggieri for anti-Muslim hatred. They will act as contact points for those communities and coordinate European efforts to combat anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. For this purpose they will cooperate with Member States, EU institutions, relevant civil society organisations and academia.

The European Parliament in its own-initiative [resolution](#) on prevention of radicalisation, adopted on 25 November 2015, stressed the importance of a holistic approach to fighting discrimination in general, and Islamophobia and anti-Semitism in particular. It also recommended the adoption of national strategies to combat Islamophobia, including tackling discrimination in access to education, employment and housing. In the [resolution](#) of 8 September 2015 on the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union the European Parliament expressed deep concern at the growth of anti-Islamic demonstrations, deplored discrimination and violence against the Muslim community, called on the Member States to condemn such acts systematically, and called on the Commission and the Member States to adopt specific policy commitments to combat all forms of racism, including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. In addition, in its February 2014 [resolution](#) on Fundamental rights in the European Union, the Parliament called for the revision of the Framework Decision to ensure that it also covers hate speech and, among others, acts of anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and religious intolerance.