

# JEWS IN GERMANY TODAY

A SURVEY

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## INTRODUCTION

This survey on Jewish life in Germany was written at a time of European crisis. From the beginning of the Russian–Ukrainian war on 24 February 2022 until the end of April 2022, around 610,000 Ukrainians sought refuge in Germany.<sup>1</sup> Like many civil, social and welfare organisations in Germany, the country’s Jewish communities are preoccupied with managing the influx of people, giving aid and organising new communal structures for meeting the religious, cultural and social needs of the Jewish refugees from Ukraine. During the first month of the war, around 3,500 Jewish Ukrainians reached Germany.<sup>2</sup>

These refugees meet not only a developed Jewish community infrastructure but also Jewish communities of which most members are migrants too. Thanks to the influx of Jews from the former Soviet Union, between 1989 and 2006 the Jewish communities in Germany grew from a population of about 30,000 to almost 108,000 members. Today there are 92,000 Jews affiliated with the Jewish communities.<sup>3</sup> Eighty per cent of them are Russian speakers and more than 40% have Ukrainian roots, according to estimates by Jewish community leaders.<sup>4</sup>

The Soviet-Jewish mass migration in the 1990s meant a radical transformation for Jewish life in Germany. Jews in Germany became the eighth biggest Jewish community in the world. Many Jewish institutions which take up a firm place within the Jewish landscape today originated in the 2000s, when Jewish life and infrastructure experienced a revival. The new developments in Germany encouraged international Jewish organisations to become active there. Local Jews also took the initiative for new projects, be they Reform synagogues, kindergartens, art academies, museums, rabbinic colleges and many more things. Today, Jewish life, which had centred around the dwindling social and religious institutions of the communities, has found new public, religious and secular spaces for living Jewish belief and identity and for negotiating up-to-date Jewish cultural, social and political standpoints.

The survey in hand spotlights four aspects of Jewish life in Germany. First, it sheds light on the average Jew in Germany. It offers a detailed picture of the social structure of Jews and their cultural and political backgrounds. This section will focus on the migratory character of the Jewish communities and on the encounters of different visions of Judaism caused by the various migratory movements. The paper will then turn to the institutional structure of Jewish life in Germany. Here, it will focus on the Jewish communities and their centralising organisation, the **ZENTRALRAT DER JUDEN IN DEUTSCHLAND** (Central Council of the Jews in Germany). It will also touch on the intra-Jewish tensions regarding the relationships of Jewish communities and Jews living in

<sup>1</sup> “Flüchtlinge aus der Ukraine in Deutschland”, Mediendienst Integration, <https://mediendienst-integration.de/migration/flucht-asyl/ukrainische-fluechtlinge.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Yannick Pasquet: “Ukraine’s Jews find ‘remarkable’ refuge in Germany, 77 years after the Holocaust”, *Times of Israel* (31 March, 2022), [www.timesofisrael.com/ukraines-jews-find-remarkable-refuge-in-germany-77-years-after-the-holocaust/](http://www.timesofisrael.com/ukraines-jews-find-remarkable-refuge-in-germany-77-years-after-the-holocaust/).

<sup>3</sup> *Mitgliederstatistik 2021 der jüdischen Gemeinden und Landesverbände in Deutschland*, Zentralwohlfahrtsstelle der Juden in Deutschland e.V., May 2022.

<sup>4</sup> “Ukrainische Juden finden Zuflucht in Deutschland”, Bundesministerium des Innern (24 March, 2022), [www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/kurzmeldungen/DE/2022/03/besuch-felix-klein.html](http://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/kurzmeldungen/DE/2022/03/besuch-felix-klein.html); Pasquet: “Ukraine’s Jews find ‘remarkable’ refuge in Germany”.

Germany. The third section ponders the question of who is representing Jewish interests in political terms. It therefore presents different organisations, their political agendas and their political style. As an extension of that, the fourth section showcases the different channels which enable intra-Jewish public debate. By spotlighting some recent media debates on Jewish matters, the section will also allow an insight into the intersections and division of labour of Jewish and non-Jewish media.

#### A NEW GERMAN JEWRY? TABOOS, ZIONISM AND THE LONG-INVOKED RENNAISSANCE OF GERMAN JEWRY

After the Holocaust, Jews in Germany represented a contested community within world Jewry. The foundation of the State of Israel and the huge waves of immigration into the Jewish state in the beginning of the 1950s were challenging the legitimacy of Jewish diaspora life. Germany, specifically, was regarded as blood-soaked earth after what the Germans and their accomplices had done to the Jewish people. Israeli and international Jewish organisations claimed that Jewish institutions in Germany had to be dissolved.<sup>5</sup>

The Jewish communities which had been reconstructed right after May 1945 by survivors, returnees and immigrants from Eastern Europe did not share that point of view. In 1950, they founded the **ZENTRALRAT DER JUDEN IN DEUTSCHLAND** (Central Council of Jews in Germany), a federal representative body of Jews in Germany. The **ZENTRALRAT**'s aim was to represent the interests of Jews in Germany towards the federal German government but also towards international Jewish organisations, and to defend the legitimacy of Jewish existence in Germany. In the years to come, remaining pre-war synagogues were reconsecrated, and new ones were built. In bigger cities like Berlin, Jewish schools were founded. These initiatives hint at the communities' will laying the ground for a Jewish future in Germany.

While the realities of the Holocaust and Israel are generally considered the "two pillars of Jewish post-war existence",<sup>6</sup> literature on German-Jewish identity after 1945 implies that these pillars had an even more shaping effect on Jewish identity in Germany. Whereas the Jewish community leaders were determined to rebuild or at least maintain Jewish life in West Germany, between the 1950s and 1970s Jewish youth grew up with a feeling of shame for living "in the house of the hangman",<sup>7</sup> with a feeling of being second-class Jews and with the imperative to make Aliyah to Israel.<sup>8</sup> Jewish community life had a Zionist outlook in Germany. Persistent antisemitism among the non-Jewish society in Germany and its denial to take responsibility for its national socialist legacy led to a further estrangement of that second generation of Jews with Germany. Hendrick M. Broder's essay collection *Stranger in One's Own Land* (1979) and Lea Flaischmann's book *This Is Not My Country* (1980), as well as the magazine *Babylon* (first issued in 1987) are intellectual testimonies of that feeling and contain powerful criticism towards their non-Jewish surroundings.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Michael Brenner: *After the Holocaust: Rebuilding Jewish Lives in Postwar Germany*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> Gören Rosenberg: "Israel and Diaspora: From Solution to Problem", in: Sandra Lustig and Ian Leveson (Eds), *Turning the Kaleidoscope: Perspectives on European Jewry*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2006, p. 107.

<sup>7</sup> Froukje Demant: "Living in the House of the Hangman: Post-War Relations Between Jews and Non-Jews in the German-Dutch Border Region", in: Stefanie Fischer, Nathanael Riemer and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (Eds), *Juden und Nichtjuden nach der Holocaust. Begegnungen in Deutschland*, Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, pp. 49–62.

<sup>8</sup> Dani Kranz: "Forget Israel – The Future Is in Berlin! Local Jews, Russian Immigrants, and Israeli Jews in Berlin and Across Germany", *Shofar*, 34(4), 2016, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Hendrick M. Broder and Michel R. Land (Eds): *Fremd im eigenen Land. Juden in der Bundesrepublik*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1979; Lea Flaischmann: *Dies ist nicht mein Land. Eine Jüdin verlässt die Bundesrepublik*, Hamburg: Hoffmann & Campe, 1980.

Much has changed for the Jewish community in Germany since the 1980s, demographically, structurally and culturally. In 1990 East Germany joined the Federal Republic, which was followed not only by a wave of grassroots racism in the early 1990s but also by a process of social and cultural pluralisation within the broader German society. On the international scene, German unification was followed by a process of Germany's further integration into the European Union (EU) up to the level that some experts regard her as the stealthy central power.<sup>10</sup> The Jewish diaspora in Europe for the last two decades has been gaining more self-confidence and is searching for an identity more independent from Zionism.<sup>11</sup> This is even more true for the Jewish community in Germany, which since the 1990s has undergone a radical demographical and cultural transition.<sup>12</sup>

The major turning point for Jewish life in Germany was Jewish mass immigration from the former Soviet Union, starting in 1989. Until 2009, around 224,000 Russian-speaking individuals with diverse Jewish backgrounds emigrated to Germany.<sup>13</sup> Their integration into German society profited from the given Jewish infrastructure, synagogues and community centres that had been maintained for five decades by the modest local Jewish community of about 20,000 to 30,000 individuals.

From the beginnings of the wave of Jewish immigration to Germany, the local Jews realised the social challenge of integrating these newcomers into the communities, but also the potential for the revival of Jewish life in Germany.<sup>14</sup> This is reflected in a flood of historical and sociological studies published in the late 1990s that accompanied the events while they were still going on. Titles like *A New German Jewry* hint at the atmosphere of novelty and the historical significance that was attributed to the Jewish immigration wave into a country that half a century earlier had committed a genocide on six million Jews.

Although the narrative of a renewed Judaism in Germany has become ubiquitous since the 1990s, it is not only associated with the Russian-Jewish influx.<sup>15</sup> North American observer Sander Gilman spoke of a "Jewish renaissance" in 1995, a development he ascribed to cultural changes and a generational shift within the Jewish community.<sup>16</sup> According to Gilman, a second generation of Jews having grown up in Germany after the Holocaust questioned the authority of the administrative elite, which consisted mainly of Holocaust survivors and had managed the communities from 1945 for 40 years uncontestedly. The second generation paved the way for pluralised Jewish life and did not shy away anymore from becoming visible as nonconformist Jews in the non-Jewish sphere.

Meanwhile, a third generation of Jews grown up and educated in Germany has entered the public and intra-Jewish scene. While classic Jewish community life around the ritual and educative institutions is continuing,

<sup>10</sup> Peter J. Katzenstein: *Tamed Power: Germany in Europe*, Cornell University Press, 1997; Simon Bluner and William E. Paterson: "Germany and the European Union: From 'Tamed Power' to Normalized Power?", *International Affairs*, 86(5), 2010, pp. 1051–1073.

<sup>11</sup> Sander L. Gilman: *Jews in Today's German Culture*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Kranz: "Forget Israel", p. 16.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Tolts: "Demography of the Contemporary Russian-Speaking Jewish Diaspora", in: Yvi Gitelman (Ed.), *The New Jewish Diaspora: Russian-Speaking Immigrants in the United States, Israel, and Germany*, New Brunswick: Rutgers, 2016, p. 23f.

<sup>14</sup> Julius Schoeps, Willi Jasper and Bernhard Vogt (Eds): *Ein neues Judentum in Deutschland? Fremd und Eigenbilder der russisch-jüdischen Einwanderer*, Potsdam: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 1999; David Polnauer: "Jüdische Gemeinden im Wandel. Ein interview", in: Julius H. Schoeps, Willi Jasper and Bernhard Vogt (Eds), *Russische Juden in Deutschland. Integration und Selbstbehauptung in einem fremden Land*, Weinheim: Beltz Athenäum, 1996.

<sup>15</sup> Dmitrij Belkin: *Germanija: wie ich in Deutschland jüdisch und erwachsen wurde*, Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2016; Dmitrij Belkin, Lara Hensch and Eva Lezzi (Eds): *Neues Judentum - altes Erinnern?: Zeiträume des Gedenkens*, Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Gilman: *Jews in Today's German Culture*, p. 19.

individual as well as collectively organised Jewish activists, intellectuals or artists are giving expression to additional or alternative ways of Jewishness. In fact, an important structural effect of the Jewish influx in the 1990s is the revival of Jewish secular culture unaffiliated to the communities. This development became manifest in several publications and initiatives from the 2000s.<sup>17</sup> These players come from different Jewish and political backgrounds, encompassing German Jews of East Germany, Russian-speaking Jews, Israelis, converts, patrilineal Jews, children and grandchildren of German-Jewish returnees, feminists, queers, etc. Dani Kranz, a West German expert on current Jewish developments in Germany and herself a descendant of German-Jewish Holocaust survivors, has labelled the current community “German Jews 2.0”. According to Kranz, “Jewish life in Germany is developing in ever more diverse ways, relieved of the burden, the mitzvah, the trauma, or pretence of being in exile in Germany and living only half a Jewish life.”<sup>18</sup> This is materialised, for example, in the work of Zionist organisations which instead of calling for Aliyah changed their focus to building relations between Jews in Germany and Israel.<sup>19</sup> While the cultural background of Jews – be it Soviet, German or Israeli – still has an impact on the self-conception of this third generation, they share a more self-confident feeling towards their life in the diaspora and “do not feel in exile from Israel” anymore.<sup>20</sup> This view is promoted also by established figures, such as the progressive rabbi Walter Homolka, a German convert, probably the contemporary German rabbi most famous among non-Jews and a driving force in the project of a “Renaissance of Judaism” in Europe and a “normalisation” of German-Jewish relations.<sup>21</sup> Having said that, another phenomenon of the diversification and increased Jewish self-confidence is the emergence of extreme right-wing Jewish groups who promote anti-immigrant politics and support anti-Muslim parties and politicians in Germany and Europe. In their political rhetoric, in turn, one of the main pillars of Jewish identity remains Israel.

The ZENTRALRAT, which still functions as the greatest umbrella organisation for Jewish communities in Germany and as the main contact partner for the federal government in political questions of Jewish interest, is still finding its way in reacting adequately to this relatively new trend of hyper differentiation and sometimes competing versions of Jewish demands and the means of representing them politically. The relation between different Jewish interests, and the ways of communicating them, will be a special focal point of this survey.

## DEMOGRAPHICS: THE MIGRANT COMMUNITY

Germany today is home to Europe’s third largest Jewish population after France and Great Britain.<sup>22</sup> The number of Jews affiliated to one of the more than 100 Jewish communities was 93,695 in 2020 and 91,839 in 2021.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Dmitrij Belkin: *Germanija: wie ich in Deutschland jüdisch und erwachsen wurde*, Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2016; Philipp Fritz: “Wir wollen Berlin judaisieren”. *Radikale Jüdische Kulturtage*, *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 30 October, 2017, [www.juedische-allgemeine.de/kultur/wir-wollen-berlin-judaisieren/?q=max%20czollek](http://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/kultur/wir-wollen-berlin-judaisieren/?q=max%20czollek); Miron Tenenberg: “Eindrücke vom ersten Kongress zeitgenössischer jüdischer Positionen im Maxim Gorki Theater”, *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 10 May, 2016, [www.juedische-allgemeine.de/kultur/desintegriert-euch/?q=max%20czollek](http://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/kultur/desintegriert-euch/?q=max%20czollek). The first issue of the journal *Jalta. Positionen zur jüdischen Gegenwart* came out in 2017. The periodical is edited by Micha Brumlik, Marina Chernivsky, Max Czollek, Hannah Peaceman, Anna Schapiro and Lea Wohl von Haselberg.

<sup>18</sup> Kranz: “Forget Israel”, p. 19.

<sup>19</sup> Kranz: “Forget Israel”, p. 22, note 26; David Ranan: *Die Schatten der Vergangenheit sind noch lang: Junge Juden über ihr Leben in Deutschland*, Berlin: Nicolai, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Kranz: “Forget Israel”, p. 18.

<sup>21</sup> Caroline Fetscher: “Walter Homolka ‘Eine Renaissance des Judentums’”, *Potsdamer Neueste Nachrichten*, 19 November, 2013, [www.pnn.de/wissenschaft/walter-homolka-eine-renaissance-des-judentums/21644448.html](http://www.pnn.de/wissenschaft/walter-homolka-eine-renaissance-des-judentums/21644448.html); Ralf Wilke: “Mich hat’s hat Typen gebraucht”, *Bundeswehr.de*, 30 July, 2020, [www.bundeswehr.de/de/organisation/streitkraeftebasis/aktuelles/mich-als-typen-hat-s-gebraucht-864470](http://www.bundeswehr.de/de/organisation/streitkraeftebasis/aktuelles/mich-als-typen-hat-s-gebraucht-864470).

<sup>22</sup> Jeffrey M. Peck: *Being Jewish in the New Germany*, New Brunswick; Rutgers University Press, 2006, p. 41.

<sup>23</sup> *Mitgliederstatistik 2020 der jüdischen Gemeinden und Landesverbände in Deutschland*, Zentralwohlfahrtsstelle der Juden in Deutschland e.V., April 2021, and *Mitgliederstatistik 2021*, Mai 2022.

According to sociologists' estimates, another 25,000 Jews are not affiliated to the communities, so Germany's actual Jewish population numbers about 117,000 individuals.<sup>24</sup> The quantitative magnitude of the Jewish community in Germany is mainly the result of the Jewish exodus from the former Soviet Union which took place after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989. Between 1989 and 2009, Germany welcomed about 224,000 so-called Jewish "Kontingentflüchtlinge" (quota refugees).<sup>25</sup> As a result, between 1980 and 2019 Germany's Jewish population growth was by far the highest (242%) in the world, converting it to the eighth largest Jewish community globally.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the Russian character of the Jewish community in Germany, the Jewish population is ethnically diverse and the result of several migration processes after the war. For instance, Jewish migration from Israel has been a motor for Jewish cultural development since 2000. Today, about 20,000 Jewish Israelis live in Germany. In addition to the Russian and Israeli influx during the last two decades, there were other smaller groups who emigrated to Germany before 1989. According to the German-Israeli anthropologist Dani Kranz, these "include Polish Jews who fled to Germany in the wake of the 1968 crisis in Poland; Russian Jews in the 1970s and 1980s; Persian Jews who left postrevolutionary Iran; some Maghrebian Jews who opted for Germany instead of France; and, numerically, the very small numbers of American, British, French, or other Western European Jews who came to Germany for reasons of marriage, partnership, business and, increasingly, lifestyle."<sup>27</sup> The non-German background of many Jews in Germany does not mean that personalities of a traditional German-Jewish family background are not visible members of the community or participate in community politics, as can be seen by public figures such as Jewish community functionaries Charlotte Knobloch and Josef Schuster or the intellectuals Michael Wolffsohn and Rafael Seligmann.

Numbers on the quantity of the Jewish population in Germany are based on the official statistics of the [ZENTRALWOHLFAHRTSSTELLE DER JUDEN IN DEUTSCHLAND](#) (Central Jewish Welfare Bureau), which publishes statistics on the members of the Jewish communities associated with the [ZENTRALRAT](#). In addition, the leading Jewish demographer Sergio Della Pergola in the *American Jewish Yearbook* offers estimates on the number of unaffiliated Jews in Germany. These numbers reflect the group of so-called "core Jews", a category that mainly overlaps with halakhic Jews. Besides this group, the *American Jewish Yearbook* also quantifies Germany's Jewish population in a wider sense. The book numbers "the total of those who have Jewish parents regardless of their current identity" as well as "the population eligible for the Law of Return".<sup>28</sup> In terms of the latter, the *Yearbook* estimates that Germany's population eligible for Israel's Law of Return is more than twice the Jewish core population, namely 275,000 (2019).<sup>29</sup> Looking at the different Jewish backgrounds, the relative composition of the Jewish population in Germany is most similar to that of the USA and Hungary, and most different to that of countries like South Africa and the UK. While in the USA core Jews make up 47% of the wider Jewish population,<sup>30</sup> it is around 43% in Germany. In countries like South Africa and the UK the core Jewish population's relative share is more than 70%. In Germany the low share of core Jews is due to the quota refugees, since fewer than the half of the 224,000 Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union were halakhically Jewish, which is why only 70,000 of them became members of the Jewish communities.<sup>31</sup> These numbers are not just interesting regarding international comparisons. They also hint at the scope of potential candidates for conversion to Judaism as well as the significance of spaces for Jewish life and representation alternative to the communities, which only accept

<sup>24</sup> Sergio Della Pergola: "World Jewish Population, 2019", in: Arnold Dashefsky and Ira M. Sheskin (Eds), *American Jewish Yearbook 2019*, Cham: Springer, 2020, pp. 287 and 308.

<sup>25</sup> Tolts: "Demography of the Contemporary Russian-Speaking Jewish Diaspora", p. 23f.

<sup>26</sup> Peck: *Being Jewish in the New Germany*, p. 41; Della Pergola: "World Jewish Population, 2019", p. 287.

<sup>27</sup> Kranz: "Forget Israel", p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> Della Pergola: "World Jewish Population, 2019", p. 278.

<sup>29</sup> Della Pergola: "World Jewish Population, 2019", p. 330.

<sup>30</sup> Della Pergola: "World Jewish Population, 2019", p. 281.

<sup>31</sup> Kranz: "Forget Israel", p. 13.

matrilineal Jews. Furthermore, they indicate the urgency of the debate on integrating patrilineal Jews into the community and are a point of reference when making predictions about the sedentarism of the Jews living in Germany. According to Della Pergola, Jews of the extended definition tend to maintain family ties with non-Jews and “their propensity to change country of residence may be lower than among core Jews”.<sup>32</sup>

Although antisemitism is one of the most urgent concerns of Jews, and emigration of German Jews to Israel gains media attention,<sup>33</sup> Jewish emigration from Germany in fact seems to play a rather insignificant role. In 2015 and 2017 only 231 people eligible for the Law of Return made Aliyah to Israel, whereas 410 individuals emigrated to Israel from Belgium, which is home to a much smaller Jewish community than Germany. In comparison, in these two years almost 11,000 Jews made Aliyah from France, which hosts a Jewish community twice as big as the German-Jewish community but lost 45 times more individuals from the wider Jewish population.<sup>34</sup> In 2018, 170 individuals eligible for the Israeli Law of Return emigrated from Germany to Israel.<sup>35</sup>

It can be assumed that cases of emigration to other countries are remote, too. According to the most recent community census, over the last 10 years an average of 160 people a year left the Jewish communities for emigration to another country. In 2020, 122 Jews resigned from their membership because of emigration. In 2021, it was 200.<sup>36</sup> These numbers include emigrations to Israel.

Despite the low emigration cases, the Jewish community in Germany is shrinking. Since 2006, when the number of Jewish community members reached a peak of 107,794 individuals, the number of Jewish community members has been decreasing. This is mainly due to the decline of the Russian-Jewish influx and the excess of deaths over births. In 2018, 227 Jewish births and 1,572 Jewish deaths were recorded by the German-Jewish community.<sup>37</sup> The Jewish community in Germany has an acutely elderly age distribution. Forty per cent of the community members are aged 65 and older.<sup>38</sup> This situation demands a strong organisational infrastructure of welfare and elderly services from the communities.<sup>39</sup> Whereas men and boys dominate the age groups from 0 to 30 with a share of 50.3% to 52.3%, there is a growing gender gap towards a female overrepresentation in the age groups 31 and older.<sup>40</sup> Withdrawal from Jewish community membership is another factor for the decrease; in some years, however, incomers compensated for this withdrawal.<sup>41</sup> The ZENTRALRAT is aware of this problem and reacted with an opinion poll among community members, ex-members and non-members to collect ideas for making the communities more attractive. Furthermore, it remains to be seen how the influx of Ukrainian-Jewish refugees in 2022 will change the picture.

#### JEWES FROM THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

Looking at the base of Jewish life, at its genuine members, the overwhelming majority of the Jewish community in Germany is of Soviet Russian descent. It is estimated that between 85% and 90% of the Jewish population in

<sup>32</sup> Della Pergola: “World Jewish Population, 2019”, p. 280.

<sup>33</sup> Dana Regev: “The Young German Jews Who Left Everything Behind – And Moved to Israel”, *Deutsche Welle*, 4 March, 2019, [www.dw.com/en/the-young-german-jews-who-left-everything-behind-and-moved-to-israel/a-47763276](http://www.dw.com/en/the-young-german-jews-who-left-everything-behind-and-moved-to-israel/a-47763276).

<sup>34</sup> Della Pergola: “World Jewish Population, 2019”, p. 318, and Della Pergola: “World Jewish Population, 2017”, in: Arnold Dashefsky and Ira M. Sheskin (Eds), *American Jewish Yearbook 2017*, Cham: Springer, 2018, p. 321.

<sup>35</sup> Della Pergola: “World Jewish Population, 2019”, p. 317.

<sup>36</sup> *Mitgliederstatistik 2020 der jüdischen Gemeinden und Landesverbände in Deutschland*, April 2021 and *Mitgliederstatistik 2021*, May 2022.

<sup>37</sup> Della Pergola: “World Jewish Population, 2019”, p. 307.

<sup>38</sup> Della Pergola: “World Jewish Population, 2019”, p. 321f.

<sup>39</sup> Della Pergola: “World Jewish Population, 2019”, pp. 307 and 322.

<sup>40</sup> *Mitgliederstatistik 2020 der jüdischen Gemeinden und Landesverbände in Deutschland*, April 2021.

<sup>41</sup> *Mitgliederstatistik 2020 der jüdischen Gemeinden und Landesverbände in Deutschland*, April 2021.

Germany today originates in the first or second generation from the former Soviet Union.<sup>42</sup> In 2006, 92.5% of the community members were immigrants from the former Soviet Union.<sup>43</sup> Thus, it cannot be surprising that Russian-speaking immigrants have not only transformed Jewish community life quantitatively but have also enormously revived Jewish culture outside of the communities.<sup>44</sup> It is the object of this section to give a demographic overview of this group and to name a few of its cultural characteristics and contributions as well as its socio-political interests, which will then be treated in more detail in the ensuing sections during the course of this survey.

While scholars within the German discourse tend to analyse the local impact of Russian-Jewish immigrants in Germany, international scholarship has pointed to Russian Jewishness as a global phenomenon. Between 1989 and 2009 more than 1.6 million Jews and their relatives left the former Soviet Union for countries in the Global West.<sup>45</sup> Sixty-one per cent of the Russian-Jewish emigrants migrated to Israel, while the USA and Germany represented the second and third biggest receiving countries.<sup>46</sup> The migration process pulled many families apart, leading to a diasporic network of Russian-speaking Jews stretched out across Israel, the USA, Germany and other countries, like Canada.<sup>47</sup> The global distribution of Russian-speaking Jews, together with factors such as security and success of integration, has led, until today, to further mobility and changes of domicile among post-Soviet Jews.

Russian-Jewish immigration to Germany started in 1989 and was first encouraged by East German politicians referring to Germany's historic responsibility towards discriminated and persecuted Jews.<sup>48</sup> The turning point in Russian-Jewish immigration to Germany happened, however, just after the German unification in 1990. The so-called **KONTINGENTFLÜCHTLINGSGESETZ** (Quota Refugee Law) was ratified in 1991 and granted Jews from the Soviet Union refugee status.<sup>49</sup> From 1989 to 2009, 224,000 Russian Jews and their families resettled in Germany.<sup>50</sup> The peak of the Soviet Russian immigration wave to Germany happened around 2004, when more Jews immigrated to Germany than to Israel. This led to conflicts on the international scene. The Jewish Agency accused Germany of "ensnaring" Jews into becoming refugees instead of immigrating into the safe haven of the Jewish state.<sup>51</sup> The **ZENTRALRAT** also intervened and called for a halt.<sup>52</sup> The German government at that time was dealing with a fraught welfare system and a historic high of the unemployment rate in 2004 and 2005.<sup>53</sup> These intra-Jewish, German and Israeli concerns led to a shift of policies. In 2005, Germany adopted a new

<sup>42</sup> Peck: *Being Jewish in the New Germany*, p. 41. The higher number is based on a more recent estimation; Dimitrij Belkin: "Jüdische Kontingentflüchtlinge und Russlanddeutsche", in: bpb, 13 July, 2017, <https://www.bpb.de/themen/migration-integration/kurz dossiers/252561/juedische-kontingentfluechtlinge-und-russlanddeutsche/>; Eliezer Ben-Rafael: "Russian Speaking Jews in Germany", in: Gitelman (Ed.), *The New Jewish Diaspora*, p. 173.

<sup>43</sup> Ellen Rubinstein and Heike von Bassewitz: *Mitgliederstatistik der jüdischen Gemeinden und Landesverbände in Deutschland für das Jahr 2007 (Auszug)*, Zentralwohlfahrtsstelle der Juden in Deutschland e.V., <https://zwst.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/Mitgliederstatistik%202007.pdf>.

<sup>44</sup> Peck: *Being Jewish in the New Germany*, p. 40.

<sup>45</sup> Tolts: "Demography of the Contemporary Russian-Speaking Jewish Diaspora", p. 23f.

<sup>46</sup> Tolts: "Demography of the Contemporary Russian-Speaking Jewish Diaspora", p. 23f.

<sup>47</sup> Tolts: "Demography of the Contemporary Russian-Speaking Jewish Diaspora", p. 31.

<sup>48</sup> Dimitrij Belkin: "Jüdische Kontingentflüchtlinge und Russlanddeutsche", Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 13 July, 2017.

<sup>49</sup> Peck: *Being Jewish in the New Germany*, p. 44.

<sup>50</sup> Tolts: "Demography of the Contemporary Russian-Speaking Jewish Diaspora", p. 23f.

<sup>51</sup> Belkin: "Kontingentflüchtlinge".

<sup>52</sup> Dmitrij Belkin and Rafael Gross (Eds): *Ausgerechnet Deutschland! Jüdisch-russische Einwanderung in die Bundesrepublik*, Berlin: Nicolai, 2010.

<sup>53</sup> Kranz: "Forget Israel", p. 11.



immigration law which ended Jewish mass immigration as abruptly as it had started. From then, Jewish migration from countries of the former Soviet Union decreased to a level of barely 100 individuals a year.

While the USA and Israel have been traditional destinations for Jewish immigration for more than a century, Germany's new significance as the third biggest permanent destination for Jewish migration in the post-war period puzzled many observers. Beyond doubt, the most important pull factor was Germany's friendly immigration legislation, which privileged Jewish applicants over those of other backgrounds. Since the immediate post-war era, Germany's trustworthiness as a Western democracy has depended on its relations with the small local Jewish community that had remained in Germany after the Holocaust.<sup>54</sup> It might not be accidental then that Germany invited Jewish immigrants at a time when the average age of the local Jewish community was very high, and the community was about to die out. The local Jewish community was highly overaged and about to debase. Russian push and German pull factors intertwined. Although Russian antisemitism was among the push factors, the decisive reason for emigration from post-Soviet Russia was of an economic nature.<sup>55</sup> Thus, an important factor that made Germany attractive to Russian immigration was her economic strength. Her proximity to Russia and her image as a country of high education and culture played a role too. Many Russian immigrants perceived Germany to be safer than Israel.<sup>56</sup>

Although the social composition of quota refugees was very diverse, there were some tendencies worthy of mention. Russian-Jewish immigrants were well educated and professionally trained, middle-aged, lived a secular lifestyle and maintained family ties with non-Jews. In terms of age, Germany tended to accept the older age cohorts. Until 2004, the median age of Jews from the former Soviet Union who went to Israel was 33, while in Germany it was 45.5. About half of the Soviet Jews who came to Germany were 45 or older.<sup>57</sup> Around 70% of those Jews who left the former Soviet Union in the 1990s had a university education. Among those coming to Germany, there was a high percentage of engineers, technicians, economists, teachers, doctors and natural scientists. However, Germany did not know how to use this Russian "brain drain"; rather, its inflexible immigration regime led to a "brain waste".<sup>58</sup> Until today, Germany has not considered herself an immigration country and social mobility is relatively low.<sup>59</sup> Regarding the Russian-Jewish immigrants in the 1990s, German authorities often did not recognise their high school diplomas, university degrees or other certificates proving their higher education. This caused a situation in the 2000s, in which almost 40% of Jews from the former Soviet Union in Germany were long-term unemployed.<sup>60</sup> Another half was retired. In the late 2000s, almost two-thirds estimate their personal income as below the national average, which is most untypical for Jews living outside Israel.<sup>61</sup> According to the most recent estimations by the Jewish welfare organisation [ZENTRALWOHLFAHRTSSTELLE DER JUDEN IN DEUTSCHLAND](#) (2022), 65,000 to 70,000 of the 220,000 former Soviet Jewish immigrants are today beneficiaries of the minimum old-age pension and live in old-age poverty.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Anthony Kauders: *Unmögliche Heimat. Eine deutsch-jüdische Geschichte der Bundesrepublik*, Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2007.

<sup>55</sup> Tolts: "Demography of the Contemporary Russian-Speaking Jewish Diaspora", p. 25.

<sup>56</sup> Peck: *Being Jewish in the New Germany*, p. 42.

<sup>57</sup> Tolts: "Demography of the Contemporary Russian-Speaking Jewish Diaspora", 2016, p. 28.

<sup>58</sup> Olaf Glöckner: "Perspektiven der russisch-jüdischen Zuwanderung auf dem deutschen Arbeitsmarkt", in: Belkin and Gross (Eds), *Ausgerechnet Deutschland!*, p. 82f.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Brockmeier and Reint E. Gropp: "Niedrige Soziale Mobilität in Deutschland: Wo liegen die Ursachen?", *Wirtschaft im Wandel*, Jg. 23(4), 2017.

<sup>60</sup> Glöckner: "Perspektiven der russisch-jüdischen Zuwanderung auf dem deutschen Arbeitsmarkt", p. 82.

<sup>61</sup> Ben-Rafael: "Russian Speaking Jews in Germany", p. 175.

<sup>62</sup> Mdr exakt: "Viele Kontingentflüchtlinge leben in Armut", 27 January, 2022, [www.mdr.de/nachrichten/deutschland/gesellschaft/armut-rente-deutschland-juden-migranten-udssr-100.html](http://www.mdr.de/nachrichten/deutschland/gesellschaft/armut-rente-deutschland-juden-migranten-udssr-100.html).



Nonetheless, social integration into German society is evaluated by experts as successful, since Russian-speaking Jews express positive attitudes towards society, satisfaction with their German language skills and a feeling of being at home, without having given up on their specific cultural identity. While many first-generation immigrants are still living in their Russian “bubble”, the overwhelming majority express high expectations in the education and social progress of their children and future generations.<sup>63</sup> In fact, 80% of young Jews with a Soviet background achieve a high school diploma and continue their educational path at colleges and universities.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, this generation does not forget its rocky family migration history. In the Jewish cultural sector, which was extremely revitalised thanks to the Russian-speaking Jewish immigration, artists of this generation recurrently dedicate their work to the hopes and disappointments which their parents and grandparents experienced during their reception by German society.<sup>65</sup>

Although not for a majority, for a big part of quota refugees the Jewish communities served as one of the key institutions of integration into local German life. About 85,000 of the 220,000 Russian immigrants became members of a Jewish community.<sup>66</sup> The local Jewish community met the Jewish influx – which was more than three times larger than itself – with mixed feelings. On the one hand, there was solidarity and enthusiasm about refreshing Jewish community life in Germany thanks to the newcomers. On the other hand, the immigration wave put a financial burden on the existing communities, which did not have the social infrastructure when it came to psychological and simple social support in finding jobs and housing and learning German. Local Jews were not free from paternalism or prejudices towards the immigrants from the East, accusing them of taking advantage of the German welfare system and misusing the communities for general integration rather than because of an intrinsic interest in Judaism.<sup>67</sup> Some veteran members expressed a feeling of estrangement from their communities because of the changes that the Russian influences brought with them.<sup>68</sup> In the Jewish community of Berlin, for example, ethnic divisions dominated internal community politics in the early 2000s. Within the last 15 years the community has had to find consensus among the different groups of German, Russian and Israeli background and those Jews who had emigrated to Germany from Eastern Europe in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>69</sup> Today, in some communities Russian Jews make up the entire community.<sup>70</sup> In many communities, the Russian language is dominant.<sup>71</sup>

There were also doubts about the Jewish authenticity of the newcomers. It is estimated that up to 80% of “Jewish” quota refugees were not halakhically Jewish.<sup>72</sup> The Soviet Union bureaucracy had recorded Jewish identity as an ethnic category (instead of a religious one) according to a citizen’s father’s family background.<sup>73</sup> This conception of Jewishness different to Halakha influenced the Jewish self-perception of many Soviet Jews. Furthermore, many Soviet Jews live in mixed marriages. It is estimated that about half of the Russian-speaking immigrants’ children are Jewish only from their father’s side.<sup>74</sup> The high amount of secularism among the

<sup>63</sup> Ben-Rafael: “Russian Speaking Jews in Germany”, p. 175.

<sup>64</sup> Olaf Glöckner: “Perspektiven der russisch-jüdischen Zuwanderung auf dem deutschen Arbeitsmarkt”, p. 83.

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, Evgenia Gostrer: *Kirschknochen* [film], produced by Evgenia Gostrer c/o Plamper+Schaeffler, 2020.

<sup>66</sup> Belkin: “Jüdische Kontingentflüchtlinge”.

<sup>67</sup> Peck: *Being Jewish in the New Germany*, p. 45.

<sup>68</sup> Peck: *Being Jewish in the New Germany*, p. 53.

<sup>69</sup> Peck: *Being Jewish in the New Germany*, p. 48.

<sup>70</sup> Peck: *Being Jewish in the New Germany*, p. 41.

<sup>71</sup> Peck: *Being Jewish in the New Germany*, p. 45.

<sup>72</sup> Peck: *Being Jewish in the New Germany*, p. 44; Kranz: “Forget Israel”, p. 13.

<sup>73</sup> Peck: *Being Jewish in the New Germany*, p. 44.

<sup>74</sup> Alina Gromova: *Generation “Kosher Light: On the Lifestyle of Young Jews”*, Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2013, p. 21.

Russian-Jewish immigrants, and the fact that the Jewish communities in Germany do not except “father Jews” as members, explain why only one-third of the quota refugees became Jewish community members.

Another aspect of why the Jewishness of the quota refugees was an object for scepticism was their lack of Jewish and religious education. The narrative that the immigrants “know they are Jews but they don’t know what Judaism is” became canonical. Indeed, this observation is not just Western “snobbery”, but is shared also by Russian-Jewish immigrants themselves.<sup>75</sup> Since the period of immediate immigration, the communities have made great efforts to enhance Jewish education and knowledge of Jewish tradition and rituals among the immigrants which would not have been successful without the latter’s motivation and proactive initiative.<sup>76</sup> It might be a result of this reclaiming of Jewish education that 20 years after their immigration to Germany more than 50% of Russian-speaking Jews in Germany identify Jewishness with religion, and for more than 40% Jewish culture is the important axis of Jewishness.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, polls indicate that a significant number of younger immigrants have turned towards orthodoxy and that it is Jews under 40 who are most involved in the communities.<sup>78</sup>

Neither of the concerns about Russian-Jewish exogamy seem to hold ground. While intermarriage, indeed, decreases the level of affiliation with Jewish organisations, it does not automatically cause a complete farewell to Jewish life. Fifty per cent of Jews married to a non-Jewish partner are still involved in Jewish institutions.<sup>79</sup> While children of a Jewish father cannot become members of the Jewish communities, they are allowed to take part in services and Jewish schools.<sup>80</sup> Another phenomenon is the conversion of patrilineal Russian Jews to Judaism.<sup>81</sup> In light of these empirical findings, claims like that of the Israeli observer Sveta Roberman that “the resurrection of Jewish life in Germany—the goal for which Germany undertook this whole immigration project—can hardly be said to have happened”<sup>82</sup> seem to be pessimistic.

Besides the differences in language, culture, social status and Jewish knowledge, there is a factor touching upon Jewish identity in Germany that adds to intra-Jewish frictions and public debate. This is the question of how much the hegemonic Jewish identity narrative in Germany reflects the specific Soviet-Jewish experiences of the bulk of community members. According to Jeffrey M. Peck, a Jewish-American scholar and resident of Berlin for more than three decades, the Russian Jew’s “relationship to the Holocaust itself and German history is less familiar and sometimes less fraught than for Jews in Germany”.<sup>83</sup> The immigrants’ attitude towards their immigration to Germany was of a pragmatic nature, wishing to settle down instead of living out of suitcases.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, the Sovietishness of many Russian-speaking Jews – identifying themselves with the victors over fascism – was not consistent with the specific German Jewishness that crystallised after the Holocaust in Germany, in which Jews identify with the symbolic role of German fascism’s victims.<sup>85</sup> Peck states that for many Russian Jews “it became a constant necessity to prove that they were victims in order to be recognized as Jewish, by Jews as well as other Germans. Unlike in Israel or the United States, these Jewish immigrants had to assume a German-Jewish narrative

<sup>75</sup> Peck: *Being Jewish in the New Germany*; Belkin: *Germanija*.

<sup>76</sup> Peck: *Being Jewish in the New Germany*, p. 49.

<sup>77</sup> Ben-Rafael: “Russian Speaking Jews in Germany”, p. 180.

<sup>78</sup> Ben-Rafael: “Russian Speaking Jews in Germany”, p. 179.

<sup>79</sup> Ben-Rafael: “Russian Speaking Jews in Germany”, p. 179.

<sup>80</sup> Peck: *Being Jewish in the New Germany*, p. 54.

<sup>81</sup> Barbara Steiner: *Die Inszenierung des Jüdischen*, Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2015.

<sup>82</sup> Sveta Roberman: *Sweet Burdens: Welfare and Communitarity among Russian Jews in Germany*, Albany: SUNY, 2015, p. VIII.

<sup>83</sup> Peck: *Being Jewish in the New Germany*, p. 42.

<sup>84</sup> Dimitri Belkin: “Mögliche Heimat: Deutsches Judentum zwei”, in: Belkin and Gross (Eds), *Ausgerechnet Deutschland!*, p. 25.

<sup>85</sup> Roberman: *Sweet Burdens*, p. 3.

of Holocaust victimhood and Soviet antisemitism that didn't necessarily belong to them."<sup>86</sup> Sveta Roberman finds that Soviet-Jewish immigrants lack a positive collective narrative.<sup>87</sup>

In sum, Russian-speaking Jewish immigration has led to a revolutionised social and cultural composition of the Jewish community in Germany. In terms of German-Jewish identity, constellations of Germanness and Jewishness today have been opened and enriched by factors such as secularism, pragmatism, and "post-Sovietishness". The influx of new Jewish identities and different historical experiences led to new cultural needs and expectations regarding the established Jewish communities. In particular, the question of patrilineal Jewishness challenges the given power structures within the Jewish sphere that is still dominated by Orthodox Judaism represented by the ZENTRALRAT resisting ritual reform. Due to a great number of people identifying as Jewish but not being affiliated with the Jewish communities, the role of the ZENTRALRAT as the one and only representative of Jewishness before the general German public is called into question. Today, Jewish intellectuals and artists of Russian descent – matrilineal and patrilineal – are highly visible in German mainstream media and become, willingly or not, figures of Jewish collective representation.

Jewish pluralisation in Germany is, of course, not just the result of Russian-Jewish immigration. Children of Jewish fathers, cultural Jewishness and Jewish reform are Jewish identities also found among the more established Jewish families in Germany. The ethnologist Alina Gromova, a former quota refugee herself, has argued that Russian-speaking Jewish youngsters, due to their diverse Jewish and migrant backgrounds in a liberal and pluralist European country like Germany, are the prototype of these "new Jews", who are negotiating forms of Jewishness fit for the future.<sup>88</sup>

As mentioned above, it remains to be seen what role the newest Russian-speaking immigration wave of spring 2022 will have within these developments. In the first month of the Russian-Ukrainian war, which started on 24 February, 2022, around 3,500 Jewish Ukrainians sought refuge in Germany.<sup>89</sup> This means in quantitative terms that on average 35 Ukrainian refugees descended on every Jewish community in Germany. In fact, however, Berlin seems to be the most important receiving community for Ukrainian refugees. Unlike the Russian-speaking immigrants during the 1990s, the Ukrainian refugees are relatively young, and mostly women and children (among the non-Jewish Ukrainian refugees in Germany about 70% are women and 40% are children<sup>90</sup>). For the last 30 years, these people have been living in a Europeanising democratic country, which set no limits to Jewish life and education and has developed a Ukrainian instead of a Soviet identity. They are meeting a developed Jewish and Russian-speaking infrastructure in Germany. A significant part of the Russian-speaking influx to Germany in the 1990s had consisted of Jews from Ukraine. From 1989 to 2001, 56% of the Soviet-Jewish immigrants came from that country.<sup>91</sup> Today, it is estimated that 45% of the Jewish community members have Ukrainian roots.<sup>92</sup> Jewish communities in Germany are mainly supporting Ukrainian refugees with finding housing and schools for their children. There are also many elderly people, some of them Holocaust survivors, who demand special care.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Peck: *Being Jewish in the New Germany*, p. 45.

<sup>87</sup> Roberman: *Sweet Burdens*, p. 2.

<sup>88</sup> Gromova: *Generation "Koscher Light"*, p. 21.

<sup>89</sup> Yannick Pasquet: "Ukraine's Jews find 'remarkable' refuge in Germany".

<sup>90</sup> "Flüchtlinge aus der Ukraine in Deutschland".

<sup>91</sup> Tolts: "Demography of the Contemporary Russian-Speaking Jewish Diaspora", p. 26.

<sup>92</sup> Lorenzo Gavarini: "Viele ukrainische Juden fliehen nach Deutschland", *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 15 April, 2022, [www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/ukraine-krieg-juden-flucht-1.5566048](http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/ukraine-krieg-juden-flucht-1.5566048).

<sup>93</sup> Gavarini: "Viele ukrainische Juden fliehen nach Deutschland".

Although this is not said officially, it is hoped that the new Jewish immigration from Ukraine will revive the aging Jewish communities in Germany.<sup>94</sup> At least the ZENTRALRAT has emphasised that the duration of the war will be uncertain, and has managed to lobby for a quick liberalisation of the Jewish quota refugee regulation. Since the end of March 2022, people who are children of Jewish parents or who have one Jewish grandmother can apply for quota refugee status without showing proof of a future workplace in Germany or knowledge of German.<sup>95</sup> This step allows Jews from Ukraine to obtain a permanent residence permit in contrast to non-Jewish Ukrainian refugees, who can currently get permission to stay in Europe for only three years. It is estimated that all in all about 5,000 Jewish Ukrainians will seek a permanent or temporary home in Germany.<sup>96</sup> This young Jewish immigration meets the Jewish community at a time of a chronic loss of members. The decrease is due to a high average age but also to a slow process of finding creative answers to young and modern Jewish identities. Given the high average age of the Jewish communities, Dmitrij Belkin, an expert in the history and sociology of Russian immigration to Germany and a former quota refugee himself, had voiced his opinion in 2017 that easier immigration laws for Jews from Russia and Ukraine should be put on the political agenda again.<sup>97</sup> This view has proven to be farsighted. It remains to be seen if the geopolitical Ukrainian solution to the demographic problems of the Jewish community in Germany will cover up the cultural roots of the problem and if it will delay the processes of modernisation within the communities.

#### ISRAELIS IN GERMANY

A phenomenon that has gained much attention from German, Israeli and international Jewish media is the presence of several thousand Jewish Israeli permanent and temporary migrants in Germany, especially in Berlin. Migration from Israel to Germany has coincided with the peak of the Soviet Russian-Jewish exodus in 2000.<sup>98</sup> While the number of Jewish Israelis currently residing in Germany has been estimated by the media to orbit around 50,000, recent sociological research financed by the German Israeli Foundation for Scientific Research and Development has reassessed the Israeli presence in Germany as being around 20,000 individuals.<sup>99</sup> Exact quantifications are problematic because of dual citizenships, lack of registration and other peculiarities of bureaucratic categorisation.<sup>100</sup> A great number of these Israelis hold European passports. According to scholarly estimations, one-third hold a German passport.<sup>101</sup> The Israeli centre in Germany is Berlin, but Munich also has a significant Israeli population.<sup>102</sup> In 2014, the number of officially registered Israelis in Berlin was 6,765, of which 3,991 (almost 60%) had single Israeli citizenship.<sup>103</sup> In 2019, there were 7,230 registered Israelis in Berlin, of which 1,756 (almost 25%) had German and Israeli citizenship.<sup>104</sup> There is no research-based knowledge on how the coronavirus crisis, travel bans and restrictions have influenced Israelis' presence in Germany.

<sup>94</sup> "Vereinfachte Zuwanderung", *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 18 March, 2022, [www.juedische-allgemeine.de/politik/vereinfachte-zuwanderung/](http://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/politik/vereinfachte-zuwanderung/).

<sup>95</sup> "Reguläres Verfahren für Zuwanderung von Juden aus der Ukraine nach Deutschland vereinfacht", Zentralrat, [www.zentralratderjuden.de/index.php?id=539](http://www.zentralratderjuden.de/index.php?id=539).

<sup>96</sup> Gavarini: "Viele ukrainische Juden fliehen nach Deutschland".

<sup>97</sup> Belkin: "Jüdische Kontingentflüchtlinge".

<sup>98</sup> Kranz: "Forget Israel", p. 8.

<sup>99</sup> Kranz: "Das Körnchen Wahrheit im Mythos: Israelis in Deutschland – Diskurse, Empirie und Forschungsdesiderate", *Medaon* 14(27), 2020, p. 5.

<sup>100</sup> Dani Kranz: "Innenansichten: Juden damals, Israelis heute? Jüdische, israelische, hybride Innenansichten nach 1700 Jahren jüdischen Lebens", Laura Cohen, Thomas Otten, Christiane Twiehaus (Eds), *Jüdische Geschichte und Gegenwart in Deutschland. Aktuelle Fragen und Positionen. Akten der Tagung 12. Und 13. April 2021 als Online-Konferenz*, Oppenheim am Rhein: Nünnerich-Asmus Verlag, 2021, p. 42.

<sup>101</sup> Kranz: "Das Körnchen Wahrheit im Mythos", p. 9.

<sup>102</sup> Kranz: "Forget Israel", p. 16.

<sup>103</sup> Della Pergola: "World Jewish Population, 2019", p. 307.

<sup>104</sup> Kranz: "Das Körnchen Wahrheit im Mythos", p. 5.

The average Israeli living in Germany is relatively young (born after 1974), originates from the geographic centre of Israel, has a liberal or politically left-wing worldview, lives a secular lifestyle and is highly skilled; e.g., holds at least a bachelor degree.<sup>105</sup> Sociological research has shown that Israelis living in Germany pronounce a strong attachment to Israeliness, but less to their Jewish origin.<sup>106</sup> They rather identify with secular or cultural Jewishness and most do not become members of the Jewish communities. Most Israelis learn German quickly and to a high standard, whereas a small cosmopolitan minority in Berlin manages well with English.

The majority of Israelis in Germany can be typed as lifestyle, labour or love migrants, or a mixture of all three. Most seek new personal and economic opportunities as well as education and professional qualifications.<sup>107</sup> Suiting their young age, half of interviewed Israelis who immigrated to Germany came to the country looking for adventure, personal challenges or a change of scene.<sup>108</sup> Sixty per cent of those interviewed came to Germany for professional reasons, and 40% in order to advance their education.<sup>109</sup> This explains why the greater part of the Israelis living in Germany do not stay for good. The situation is different for those Israelis who came to Germany for love. Almost one-third of the Israelis interviewed by Kranz came to Germany because of a German partner. Fifty-four per cent of the interviewed Israelis who are married live with a non-Jewish spouse.<sup>110</sup> The rate of divorce of Israelis in Germany is estimated at 50% to 70%. This is not surprising, since divorce rates in Israel are high and interconfessional and intercultural marriages generally tend to be more vulnerable to separation. Divorces mostly lead to the return migration of the Israeli spouse to Israel.<sup>111</sup>

The boom in Israeli permanent or temporary immigration to Germany is caused by several factors. First of all, Israelis' presence in Germany is part of a broader phenomenon of a global "Israeli Diaspora".<sup>112</sup> Although Israelis' presence in Germany possesses its own dynamics, it must be seen within the context of a generally high degree of mobility in Israel. To quote anthropologist Dani Kranz: "Owing to cheap air travel and a high level of education, and hence earning power, the overwhelming majority of all Israeli immigrants can afford a somehow transnational lifestyle, which supports the lack of feeling in exile, and which diminishes the feeling of homesickness."<sup>113</sup>

On the Israeli side, an important push factor is the precarious economic situation of professions in the liberal arts. The specific structure of the Israeli labour market is disadvantageous towards graduates of the humanities or social sciences.<sup>114</sup> Israelis living in Germany belong to the Jewish-Israeli middle class or to a profession which was hit especially hard by processes of economic neoliberalisation in Israel in the 2000s.<sup>115</sup>

Besides that, there are enabling structures on the German side that give Israeli immigration to Germany a legal and organisational frame. One of these is a pool of scholarships and exchange programmes, which had originally been part of German redemption after the Holocaust as well as cultural diplomacy and developed a momentum of its own.<sup>116</sup> These programmes particularly attract artists and scholars. Another important infrastructural factor

<sup>105</sup> Kranz: "Das Körnchen Wahrheit im Mythos", pp. 5, 8.

<sup>106</sup> Ina Holev: "Israelis in Germany", deutschland.de, 7 September, 2020, [www.deutschland.de/en/topic/life/israelis-in-germany-interview-about-migration](http://www.deutschland.de/en/topic/life/israelis-in-germany-interview-about-migration).

<sup>107</sup> Kranz: "Forget Israel", p. 19.

<sup>108</sup> Kranz: "Das Körnchen Wahrheit im Mythos", p. 10.

<sup>109</sup> Kranz: "Das Körnchen Wahrheit im Mythos", p. 9.

<sup>110</sup> Kranz: "Das Körnchen Wahrheit im Mythos", p. 8f.

<sup>111</sup> Kranz: "Das Körnchen Wahrheit im Mythos", p. 12.

<sup>112</sup> Steven M. Gold: *The Israeli Diaspora*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002.

<sup>113</sup> Kranz: "Forget Israel", p. 16.

<sup>114</sup> Kranz: "Das Körnchen Wahrheit im Mythos", p. 6.

<sup>115</sup> Kranz: "Das Körnchen Wahrheit im Mythos", p. 9; Larissa Remennick: "The Israeli Diaspora in Berlin: Back to Being Jewish?", *Israel Studies Review*, 34(2019), 1, S. 88–109.

<sup>116</sup> Kranz: "Das Körnchen Wahrheit im Mythos", p. 6.

is the German Nationality Law, which grants citizenship to former German citizens who had been deprived of it in the Nazi era. The law enables Israelis with one German-Jewish grandparent to apply for citizenship.<sup>117</sup> According to a report in the German Parliament, between the years of 2000 and 2015 32,000 Israelis accepted German citizenship.<sup>118</sup> Israelis apply for EU passports for personal reasons, to simplify international travel or as an inner-Israeli “status symbol”.<sup>119</sup> The numbers published on German passport acquisition and Israelis living in Germany indicate that more than 10% of Israeli German passport receivers make use of the possibility to live in Germany, at least for a limited time period.<sup>120</sup> Application numbers for EU (including German) passports started to rise with the wave of terrorism attacks in Israel and the opening of the EU towards Eastern European countries like Poland and Hungary in 2004. An interest in EU citizenship is clearly connected to the security situation in Israel. In Germany, citizenships granted to Israelis reached their peak in the year of the Lebanon war in 2006.<sup>121</sup> Since obtaining German citizenship for Israeli Jews of German descent was possible before 2000, scholars connect the sudden higher demand for German passports with a de-stigmatisation of German citizenship due to broader developments within the EU. Sociologist Yossi Harpaz writes: “As ever more Israelis acquired citizenship from countries like Poland or Hungary, it became increasingly legitimate and socially acceptable to have a ‘European passport’; this effect spilled over into the most controversial and provocative citizenship. [...] EU integration increased the legitimacy of German citizenship by minimizing its association with Germany.”<sup>122</sup>

Having outlined the causes of Israelis’ presence in Germany, Harpaz’s observation turns to the cultural and political *effects* of Israelis’ presence in Germany. This presence is interpreted in several patterns belonging to the canon of German-Jewish and German-Israeli relations charged with trauma and mistrust on the Jewish side and the frantic attempts to normalise the relationship on the German side. German media has reported on Israelis’ presence mainly benevolently and with curiosity and in the style of a certain German exoticism of everything Jewish. Hebrew media takes a more critical stand and resonates with the Zionist imperative for Jewish life in Israel. In 2016, for example, the Hebrew edition of *HAARETZ* featured a controversy between stayers in Israel and emigrants to Germany.<sup>123</sup> All in all, the generation of Israelis coming to Germany today is less apologetic about living in Germany, of all countries, than Israelis had been 20 years ago.<sup>124</sup>

In recent years Israelis in Germany have interpreted their emigration in several ways. In a sociological interview project, 50% of the participants connected their immigration to Germany with their interest in German culture. Some see it as a political act and a rejection of Zionism; others highlight the opportunity of creating a new Hebrew diasporic culture “de-territorialised” from the Zionist “overhang”.<sup>125</sup> Some pronounce general criticism against Zionism.<sup>126</sup> Others do not want their children to serve in the Israeli army or are tired of the ongoing armed conflict with Israel’s neighbouring countries and the insecurity that comes with this.<sup>127</sup> These Israelis see themselves as

<sup>117</sup> Yossi Harpaz: *Citizenship 2.0: Dual Nationality as a Global Asset*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019.

<sup>118</sup> TOI Staff: “Over 33,000 Israelis have Taken German Citizenship Since 2000”, [timesofisrael.com](https://www.timesofisrael.com/over-33000-israelis-have-taken-german-citizenship-since-2000/), 12 February, 2017, [www.timesofisrael.com/over-33000-israelis-have-taken-german-citizenship-since-2000/](https://www.timesofisrael.com/over-33000-israelis-have-taken-german-citizenship-since-2000/).

<sup>119</sup> Yossi Harpaz: “Rooted Cosmopolitans: Israelis with a European Passport – History, Property, Identity”, *International Migration Review*, 47(1), 2013, 166–206.

<sup>120</sup> Harpaz: “Rooted Cosmopolitans”, p. 188.

<sup>121</sup> Harpaz: *Citizenship 2.0*, p. 102.

<sup>122</sup> Harpaz: *Citizenship 2.0*, p. 104f.

<sup>123</sup> Kranz: “Forget Israel”, p. 14. Fania Oz-Salzberger had already put the topic on the agenda in 2001 when she published her book *Israelim, Berlin*. The book came out in German translation in 2016.

<sup>124</sup> Kranz: “Das Körchen Wahrheit im Mythos”, p. 4.

<sup>125</sup> Hila Amit: “The Revival of Diasporic Hebrew in Contemporary Berlin”, in: Jennifer R. Hosek and Karin Bauer (Eds), *Cultural Topographies of the New Berlin: An Anthology*, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2017, pp. 253–273; Kranz: “Das Körchen Wahrheit im Mythos”, p. 7.

<sup>126</sup> Kranz: “Forget Israel”, p. 14.

<sup>127</sup> Kranz: “Das Körchen Wahrheit im Mythos”, p. 11.

politically marginalised within the religious and conservative Israeli mainstream, and seek ideological connections elsewhere.<sup>128</sup>

Indeed, one of the push factors for Israelis to leave their home country is the role of religion. They have experienced religion in Israel as intimidating.<sup>129</sup> This is one of the factors explaining the Israeli immigrants' low interest in joining the Jewish communities. The Jewish communities, on the other hand, endeavour to integrate Jewish Israelis into them. This turns out to be a frustrating undertaking, as one rabbi quoted in a research paper said, having heard data on the secularism of Israelis in Germany: "Now that I heard your presentation on Israelis in Berlin, I know it wasn't about me: Israelis are not attracted to Jewish communities, I told my board we waste resources on outreach to them."<sup>130</sup>

This seems a rather radical conclusion since there are, in fact, Israelis who do become community members or visit community events. There is also the phenomenon that the experience of living in the diaspora and being a member of a once-persecuted minority group make some Israelis rediscover their Jewishness, and they become more engaged within the local Jewish community or organise their own Seders for the Jewish holidays. Jews born or raised in Israel, furthermore, play an influential role in the communities as rabbis or elected representatives. Board members of the Berlin Jewish Community, for example, include Israeli-born Gideon Joffe and Sara Nachama. The latter immigrated in 1978 and is the Vice President and Rector of the Touro College for Holocaust Studies in Berlin. The Synagogue of Mannheim has an Israeli cantor, Amnon Seelig, who is of German-Jewish descent.<sup>131</sup> Israeli scholars are present in the research centres for Jewish studies, Jewish theology and Jewish history in Potsdam, Heidelberg and Berlin. Israelis are among the students of Jewish Studies or Jewish Theology programmes. There are Israelis among the scholarship holders of the [ERNST LUDWIG EHRlich SCHOLARSHIP FUND](#). Some of the liberal rabbis trained at the [ABRAHAM GEIGER COLLEGE](#) are Israelis.

Due to the temporary character of most Israelis presence in Germany and their economically privileged backgrounds, Jewish Israelis as a group have not formulated socio-political demands so far. Their influence on the representation of Judaism in Germany, and also on Jewish rites, pop culture and intra-Jewish discussions on Judaism, cannot be overlooked. Due to their background as having been raised as a Jew in a Jewish country and their mainly left-wing political orientation, Israeli Jews might pave the way for a less romanticised relationship towards Israel within the communities. At least they seem to have a different approach towards criticism of Israeli politics than more established German Jews, which can lead to conflicts within the communities.<sup>132</sup> Furthermore, Israelis have an interest in Hebrew or English-language infrastructure within the communities. To mention one example, this finds expression in the bilingual German–Hebrew kindergarten groups founded by the conservative movement Masorti e.V. in Berlin.<sup>133</sup>

#### CONVERSIONS AND CONVERTS

Conversion of German non-Jews to Judaism is an emotionally loaded topic within the German-Jewish historical context. Although the phenomenon is statistically insignificant, it should be discussed in the framework of this general survey. Looking at empirical findings prevents myth-making but also allows one to evaluate the cultural and political significance of conversion to Judaism in Germany.

<sup>128</sup> Kranz: "Das Körnchen Wahrheit im Mythos", p. 9.

<sup>129</sup> Kranz: "Innenansichten: Juden damals, Israelis heute", p. 46.

<sup>130</sup> Kranz: "Forget Israel", p. 7.

<sup>131</sup> Martina Senghas: "Ein Tag mit Amnon Seelig, Kantor der Jüdischen Gemeinde Mannheim", *SWR2*, 21 November, 2021, [www.swr.de/swr2/musik-klassik/ein-tag-mit-amnon-seelig-kantor-der-juedischen-gemeinde-mannheim-100.html](http://www.swr.de/swr2/musik-klassik/ein-tag-mit-amnon-seelig-kantor-der-juedischen-gemeinde-mannheim-100.html).

<sup>132</sup> Kranz: "Forget Israel", p. 11.

<sup>133</sup> "Masorti Kindertagesstätten (1 Jahr bis Schuleintritt)", [www.masorti.de/kindergarten\\_de.html](http://www.masorti.de/kindergarten_de.html).



According to published records of the ZENTRALWOHLFAHRTSSTELLE, an average of 66 people join the Jewish communities every year by way of conversion. Between 1990 and 2020 a sum of around 2,000 converts joined the Jewish communities.<sup>134</sup> These official data slightly differ from the numbers that representatives of the German General Rabbi Conference and the Orthodox Rabbi Conference have presented recently in the general Jewish weekly *JÜDISCHE ALLGEMEINE*. According to these reports, every year there are between 30 and 40 Orthodox conversions and between 80 and 100 new Jews, whose conversion was accepted by the General Rabbi Conference. The latter figures include converts of a patrilineal Jewish background.<sup>135</sup> The numbers published by the *JÜDISCHE ALLGEMEINE* and the ZENTRALWOHLFAHRTSSTELLE imply that between 2% and 5% of the Jewish community members in Germany are converts.

While the phenomenon of German converts to Judaism is quantitatively marginal, the topic is sensible and gains disproportional attention from the media and in the Jewish community.<sup>136</sup> German converts are suspected of a psychological and political motivation instead of a spiritual one. It is assumed that they feel family biographical guilt for Nazi crimes committed against Jews and wish to overcome these emotions by changing sides from the collective of the perpetrators to that of the Jewish victims. The historian Barbara Steiner, a German convert herself, has argued in this direction in her study *JEWISH ENACTMENTS: CONVERSIONS OF GERMANS TO JUDAISM AFTER 1945*. According to Steiner, some converts use their Jewish changeover to come to terms with the German past and instrumentalise Jewishness because of an identification with Jewish victimhood. Others join the Jewish "side" because they refuse to take responsibility for contemporary German antisemitism. Steiner's analysis, which is based only on 15 interviews, partly forces German converts into a similar corner to that of Wilkomirski Syndrome, which is also seen as serving non-Jews' desires to become part of the allegedly more moral collective of the Jewish victims.<sup>137</sup> According to Walter Rothschild, a British rabbi of German-Jewish descent working in Germany, being Jewish became "sexy" in Germany.<sup>138</sup> Indeed, the demand for becoming Jewish seems to be much higher than the actual conversions carried out. One rabbi is faced with between 200 and 700 conversion requests a year.<sup>139</sup> Given the difference between these and the actual numbers of conversions, German rabbis seem to have developed an advanced awareness of the described overidentification of non-Jews with Jewish victimhood, and a functioning radar to filter out worthy candidates for conversion.

The political aspects of instrumentalising Jewishness remain an important point when reflecting on German conversion in the German context. It has to be kept in mind, however, that a significant number of Jewish converts change their religion to Judaism for marriage, religious beliefs, and an affection for Jewish communality and culture. All these motives for practising Judaism are not uniquely German and can, partly, also be found among Jews by birth. Having said that, on a qualitative level converts do leave an imprint on Jewish life in Germany today. That is the case especially when converts are visible as Jewish spokespersons and bear influence on Jewish ritual and community life. Although the number of conversions to Judaism is relatively small in

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<sup>134</sup> Mitgliederstatistik 2020 der jüdischen Gemeinden und Landesverbände in Deutschland, April 2021; Heike von Bassewitz: Mitgliederstatistik der jüdischen Gemeinden und Landesverbände in Deutschland für das Jahr 2015 (Auszug), Zentralwohlfahrtsstelle der Juden in Deutschland e.V., p. 6.

<sup>135</sup> Andreas Nachma, Jonah Sievers, Gesa Ederberg, Pinchas Goldschmidt, Avichai Apel and Jehoschua Ahrens: "Konversion. Ein Urteil, sechs Meinungen", *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 11 March, 2021, [www.juedische-allgemeine.de/religion/ein-urteil-sechs-meinungen/?q=giur%2080%20100%20konferenz](http://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/religion/ein-urteil-sechs-meinungen/?q=giur%2080%20100%20konferenz). The Zentralwohlfahrtsstelle does not provide separate data on conversions from people with a Jewish father.

<sup>136</sup> Naomi Lubrich, "Konversion & Kontroverse. Gedanken über die Konjunktur dieses Themas und über religiöse Loyalität", *Jüdischen Museums Berlin*, 2013, [www.jmberlin.de/node/6419](http://www.jmberlin.de/node/6419).

<sup>137</sup> Irene Dieckmann and Julius H. Schoeps: *Das Wilkomirski-Syndrom: Eingebildete Erinnerungen oder von der Sehnsucht Opfer zu sein*. Zurich: Pendo Verlag, 2002.

<sup>138</sup> Jens Rosbach: "Das seltsame Leben der 'Fake'-Juden", *Deutschlandfunk*, 22 October, 2020, [www.deutschlandfunk.de/hochstapler-mit-falscher-juedischer-identitaet-das-seltsame-100.html](http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/hochstapler-mit-falscher-juedischer-identitaet-das-seltsame-100.html).

<sup>139</sup> Steiner: *Die Inszenierung des Jüdischen*, p. 85.

Germany, some converts inherit key religious posts. These include rabbis, cantors, high school teachers in Jewish schools or professors in Jewish higher education.<sup>140</sup> At the **ACADEMY FOR JEWISH STUDIES** in Heidelberg, for example, where social workers and teachers of Judaism are trained, at least two out of nine professors are converts.<sup>141</sup> Converts are especially visible in the Reform Jewish movement.<sup>142</sup> In the **GENERAL CONFERENCE OF RABBIS (ALLGEMEINE RABBINERKONFERENZ)**, at least six of 29 rabbis and rabbas are Jews by choice. Most of them have been ordained or were otherwise engaged in the rabbinical education program of the **ABRAHAM GEIGER COLLEGE**, which is part of the **WORLD UNION OF PROGRESSIVE JUDAISM** and was founded, and until recently headed, by a convert to Judaism.<sup>143</sup> The **ABRAHAM GEIGER COLLEGE**, furthermore, ordained several other converted rabbis in the last decade, who now work as community rabbis in Germany. According to Barbara Steiner, in Germany “the new liberal Judaism is formed to a large degree by converts, who in their majority have [...] grown up with Christianity and converted on their own initiative.”<sup>144</sup> It is this group in particular and its role as a rabbinical authority that is under suspicion of transferring Christian motives and beliefs into the Jewish communities. According to Steiner, converted rabbis changed the role of the community rabbi towards pastoral and spiritual care. Converted rabbis also introduced new forms of religious service, such as services for children.<sup>145</sup> According to Steiner, the convert’s initiative to engage in a leading Jewish position originates from their desire to help revive the Jewish community in Germany.<sup>146</sup> Not mentioning Israeli, American and British agents, she predicts that the Jewish religious future in Germany will be characterised by two groups: Russian-speaking immigrants and German converts.<sup>147</sup>

## RELIGION AND JEWISH EDUCATION

Institutionalised Jewish life mainly circulates around Jewish community centres with the synagogue in their hearts. American observer Jonathan Peck summarised the character of the Jewish community structure in 2006: “it has a hierarchical and all-encompassing umbrella-like structure directed from the top”.<sup>148</sup> Saying this, Peck referred to the concept of the “**EINHEITSGEMEINDE**” (unified community), which is still the dominant model of Jewish self-organisation in Germany. The **EINHEITSGEMEINDE** brings all synagogues and places of Jewish life and culture existing in one city under the umbrella of one administrative community leadership. The **EINHEITSGEMEINDE** employs rabbis, provides Jewish education and social welfare, and represents Jewish interests towards non-Jewish bodies and cooperative partners. The Jewish communities are governed by executive boards and representative boards (parliaments) which are elected by the community members. Voter participation in larger communities is traditionally low. In Berlin it was less than 30% in 2011; in Frankfurt am Main it was 22% in 2020.<sup>149</sup> In some communities there have been conflicts for several years which revolve

<sup>140</sup> Steiner: *Die Inszenierung des Jüdischen*, p. 273.

<sup>141</sup> Eliezer Ben-Rafael, Olaf Glöckner and Yitzhak Sternberg: *Jews and Jewish Education in Germany Today*, Leiden: Brill, 2013, p. 129.

<sup>142</sup> Steiner: *Die Inszenierung des Jüdischen*, p. 270.

<sup>143</sup> <http://a-r-k.de/rabbiner/>.

<sup>144</sup> Steiner: *Die Inszenierung des Jüdischen*, p. 270.

<sup>145</sup> Steiner: *Die Inszenierung des Jüdischen*, p. 271.

<sup>146</sup> Steiner: *Die Inszenierung des Jüdischen*, p. 268.

<sup>147</sup> Steiner: *Die Inszenierung des Jüdischen*, p. 270.

<sup>148</sup> Peck: *Being Jewish in the New Germany*, p. 6.

<sup>149</sup> Christine Eichelmann: “Geringe Wahlbeteiligung bei jüdischer Gemeinde”, *Berliner Morgenpost*, 4 December, 2011), [www.morgenpost.de/berlin/article105349029/Geringe-Wahlbeteiligung-bei-Juedischer-Gemeinde.html](http://www.morgenpost.de/berlin/article105349029/Geringe-Wahlbeteiligung-bei-Juedischer-Gemeinde.html). In 2003 it was 35% – see Peck: *Being Jewish in the New Germany*, p. 46; “Gemeinderatswahl 2020. Bekanntgabe des Wahlergebnisses der Gemeinderatswahl vom 13.09.2020”, Jüdische Gemeinde Frankfurt am Main, 14 September, 2020, <https://jg-ffm.de/en/termine-neues/vergangenes/2020-09-14-wichtig-gemeinderatswahl-2020>. According to unofficial sources in the Jewish Community of Cologne, voter participation was 19% in 2021. See Anatoli Kreyman: “Wahlergebnisse – Gemeindevertretung der Synagogen-

around favouritism among the established leaderships and the participation of Russian-speaking members in the communities' leaderships.<sup>150</sup> According to historian and Jewish writer Michael Wolffsohn, another point of criticism against the Jewish political functionaries is that they "lacked an intellectual dimension or Jewish spiritual side to guide the community".<sup>151</sup>

Above the **EINHEITSGEMEINDE**, the next level of association is the **LANDESVERBAND** (state association), which unites the **EINHEITSGEMEINDEN** under one roof on the federal state level. The Jewish **LANDESVERBÄNDE**, in turn, unite in the **ZENTRALRAT**, which represents the Jewish communities on a national level. The **ZENTRALRAT** holds the legal status of **KÖRPERSCHAFT DES ÖFFENTLICHEN RECHTS**, or K.d.ö.R. (public body), which comes with certain tax exemptions and represents legal treatment of the Jewish community equal to that of the Catholic and Protestant churches. Out of a feeling of historical responsibility towards Jews in Germany, the federal German government concluded a so-called **STAATSVETRAG** (state contract) with the **ZENTRALRAT** in 2003, in which the German Federal Republic committed herself to support the **ZENTRALRAT** financially. According to the contract, it is the German Federal Republic's aim to conserve and cultivate German-Jewish heritage, help reconstruct the Jewish community and support the **ZENTRALRAT** in performing its tasks in social welfare and integration. In 2018, the contract was amended, and the financial support dedicated to the **ZENTRALRAT** was augmented to 13 million euros. The money cannot be used for the religious purposes of the communities. The Jewish **LANDESVERBÄNDE** have concluded similar agreements on a federal state level. A second source of income for the Jewish communities are synagogue taxes, which are paid by members via the general German income taxes or directly to the Jewish communities.<sup>152</sup> Donations and Jewish patronage play a less significant role in the budget of the communities.<sup>153</sup>

Another important actor in institutionalised Jewish community life is the **ZENTRALWOHLWAHRSTSTELLE DER JUDEN IN DEUTSCHLAND**. This Jewish welfare organisation, which was re-established in 1951, has a close connection to the **ZENTRALRAT** and functions as a sort of social operating agent. The **ZENTRALWOHLFAHRSTSTELLE** is the provider of several Jewish welfare institutions such as kindergartens and old-age homes. It has about 120 employees and offers services ranging from immigrant integration and psychological support for Ukrainian refugees to workshops on collecting statistical data on community members and international Jewish youth congresses.<sup>154</sup>

Most of Jewish institutional life is financed by the state, and funds are distributed to Jewish life on the ground through the channels of the **ZENTRALRAT**, **LANDESVERBÄNDE** and **EINHEITSGEMEINDE**. During the last 15 years, however, there have occurred some innovations regarding both financing organisations on the one hand

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Gemeinde Köln 2021", WSGK – Jüdische Gemeindevahlen, 7 November, 2021, [www.wsgk.de/wahlergebnisse-wahlen-synagogengemeinde-2021/](http://www.wsgk.de/wahlergebnisse-wahlen-synagogengemeinde-2021/).

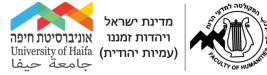
<sup>150</sup> See Sergy Lagodinsky: "Der Morgen und danach... Die Suche nach einem neuen politischen Selbstverständnis für die jüdische Gemeinschaft", in: Belkin and Gross (Eds), *Ausgerechnet Deutschland!*, pp. 168–170. Also see Jens Rosbach: "Streit in Berlins Jüdischer Gemeinde. Wie sauber war die Wahl zum Gemeindeparlament?", *Deutschlandfunk Kultur*, 23 January, 2016, [www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/streit-in-berlins-juedischer-gemeinde-wie-sauber-war-die-100.html](http://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/streit-in-berlins-juedischer-gemeinde-wie-sauber-war-die-100.html); Zlatan Alihodzic: "Duisburg. Quo vadis? Nach den Vorstandswahlen gibt es Streit über die Ausrichtung der Gemeinde", *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 25 February, 2014, [www.juedische-allgemeine.de/gemeinden/quo-vadis/?q=wahlbeteiligung%20gemeinde](http://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/gemeinden/quo-vadis/?q=wahlbeteiligung%20gemeinde).

<sup>151</sup> Wolffsohn: "Jews in Divided Germany (1945–1990) and Beyond", in: Haim Fireberg and Olaf Glöckner (Eds), *Being Jewish in 21st-Century Germany*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015, p. 26.

<sup>152</sup> Kranz: "Forget Israel", p. 13; Walter Homolka: "Jüdische Organisationen", Heinrich Oberreuter, Bruno Steimer (Eds), *Staatslexikon. Recht – Wirtschaft – Gesellschaft*, Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder Verlag, Part 3, 2018, pp. 599–604.

<sup>153</sup> Klaus Krämer: "Gemeindeleben ohne Kirchensteuer", *Deutsche Welle*, 25 October, 2012, [www.dw.com/de/gemeindeleben-ohne-kirchensteuer/a-16327854](http://www.dw.com/de/gemeindeleben-ohne-kirchensteuer/a-16327854).

<sup>154</sup> <https://zwst.org/de/ueber-uns/wir-ueber-uns>.



and Jewish organisations channelling public funds on the other. In 1997, the **UNION OF PROGRESSIVE JEWS IN GERMANY** was established. In the first few years after its foundation, the **ZENTRALRAT** and the **UNION** had a relationship characterised by financial and ideological competition.<sup>155</sup> The **ZENTRALRAT** insisted on the principle of the **EINHEITSGEMEINDE** defending its status as the one and only representative body of Jews in Germany and eventual receiver of public funding from the German federal authorities. Today, the **UNION OF PROGRESSIVE JEWS** receives direct financial support from the federal government as well as a share of the **STAATSVETRAG**.<sup>156</sup> This means that the **UNION** is a distributor of funds to Jewish life different to the **ZENTRALRAT**. The **UNION** runs 28 Jewish communities, not all but the majority of which belong to the 105 Jewish communities in Germany affiliated to the **ZENTRALRAT**.<sup>157</sup> Associated with the **UNION** is the **ABRAHAM GEIGER COLLEGE**, which has been training liberal rabbis at the University of Potsdam since 1999. In 2010, the **ABRAHAM GEIGER COLLEGE** ordained the first female rabbi in Germany since the Holocaust. Rabbi Alina Treiger, who came to Germany from Ukraine in 2001, serves as the rabbi of the Jewish community in Oldenburg.

The **ABRAHAM GEIGER COLLEGE** is supported by the **LEO BAECK FOUNDATION**, which was founded in 2006. Other initiatives of the **FOUNDATION** are the **ZACHARIAS FRANKEL COLLEGE**, which trains conservative rabbis at the University of Potsdam, and the **ERNST LUDWIG EHRlich STUDIENWERK (ELES)**, which provides university scholarships for Jewish students and non-Jewish PhD students researching topics of Jewish interest. The **LEO BAECK FOUNDATION**, furthermore, manages the art program **DAGESH**, which is financed by the Federal Ministry for Education and Science. Due to their association with the **LEO BAECK FOUNDATION**, **DAGESH** and **ELES** share an institutional proximity to religious, albeit non-Orthodox, Jewish streams. In practice, however, both programmes create an important secular space for young Jews and Jewish artists to develop innovative Jewish standpoints on contemporary social challenges and provide a platform for an educated intra-Jewish discussion. The institutional stability of all these organisations and programs associated with the Progressive movement was put in danger in spring 2022 following a management crisis. It remains to be seen how sustainable these institutions will be, after Rabbi Walter Homolka, a rabbi who held several leading positions in these organisations and was the main fundraiser, has stepped down from his positions.<sup>158</sup>

Other players boosting religious and organisational pluralism and competition are foreign organisations, most notably **CHABAD** and the **LAUDER FOUNDATION**.<sup>159</sup> They, too, provide a fresh stimulus to communal development and are alternative sources of funding for Jewish institutions and events.<sup>160</sup> The **LAUDER FOUNDATION** runs two schools and a kindergarten in Berlin and Cologne. In cooperation with the **ZENTRALRAT**, the **LAUDER FOUNDATION** has been training Orthodox rabbis at the **RABBINERSEMINAR ZU BERLIN E.V.** since 2009.<sup>161</sup> After **CHABAD** opened its first office in Germany in 1988, it intensified its activities in Germany parallel to the Jewish influx from the former Soviet Union. Today, it runs 18 **CHABAD** centres and is active in 19 cities with 34 rabbis.<sup>162</sup> In Berlin **CHABAD** sponsors and organises a kindergarten and the **JEWISH TRADITIONAL**

<sup>155</sup> Peck: *Being Jewish in the New Germany*, p. 54.

<sup>156</sup> Homolka: "Jüdische Organisationen".

<sup>157</sup> Numbers refer to the year 2017: [www.zentralratderjuden.de/der-zentralrat/ueber-uns/](http://www.zentralratderjuden.de/der-zentralrat/ueber-uns/).

<sup>158</sup> Benjamin Lassiwe: „Vorwurf Belästigung und Machtmissbrauch. Rabbiner Walter Homolka zieht sich vorerst vom Potsdamer Abraham-Geiger-Kolleg zurück, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 7 July, 2022,

<https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/vorwurf-belaestigung-und-machtmissbrauch/28313606.html>, Juliane Löffler: "Na, dann schicke ich dir mal ein Bild von mir", *Der Spiegel*, 13 May, 2022, [www.spiegel.de/panorama/gesellschaft/abraham-geiger-kolleg-in-potsdam-das-offenbar-toxische-system-von-walter-homolka-a-131eb4af-9a90-45f5-914d-89ae05c5cb5ce](http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/gesellschaft/abraham-geiger-kolleg-in-potsdam-das-offenbar-toxische-system-von-walter-homolka-a-131eb4af-9a90-45f5-914d-89ae05c5cb5ce).

<sup>159</sup> Olaf Glöckner: "New Structures of Jewish Education in Germany", in: Haim Fireberg and Olaf Glöckner (Eds), *Being Jewish in 21st-Century Germany*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015, p. 238.

<sup>160</sup> Ben-Rafael: "Russian Speaking Jews in Germany", p. 174

<sup>161</sup> Homolka: "Jüdische Organisationen", p. 603.

<sup>162</sup> <http://chabad.de/>.

**SCHOOL (OR AVNER)** for girls, whose graduates achieved the first rank among all Berlin grammar schools in 2018 and 2021.<sup>163</sup> The **CHABAD** centre for Jewish education has been training Orthodox rabbis since 2007.<sup>164</sup> According to information provided by **CHABAD**, its centre in Berlin has about 700 weekly visitors.<sup>165</sup>

Whereas the **LAUDER FOUNDATION** and the **EINHEITSGEMEINDE** communities collaborate relatively harmoniously, **CHABAD LUBAVITCH** is seen as a potential competitor to the **EINHEITSGEMEINDE**. There is no academic research on the influence of **CHABAD** on Judaism and on Jewish infrastructure in Germany, nor on the organisation's financial strength. In official statements made by the **ZENTRALRAT**, **CHABAD** is presented as a "cult" and questionable in terms of its Jewish messianic ideology.<sup>166</sup> The **EINHEITSGEMEINDE** management expresses a feeling of competition caused by **CHABAD**'s proactive and financially well positioned setup of Jewish communal infrastructure independent from the **EINHEITSGEMEINDE**.<sup>167</sup> The fact that **CHABAD** operates internationally is seen as a threat to the locally developed identity of the communities. This comes with the fear that **CHABAD** rabbis were trying to take over the existing Jewish communities and aiming at making Jewish life in Germany more Orthodox. In fact, several **EINHEITSGEMEINDEN** employ rabbis who belong to the **CHABAD** movement. In some cities the only community rabbi happens to be **CHABAD**. Most famous for its conflicts between **CHABAD** and other streams of Judaism is the community of Hamburg. Here the Landesrabbiner, the Chief Rabbi of the Hamburg district, is a Shaliah **CHABAD**. He has been accused of avoiding cooperation with the liberal synagogues in the city.<sup>168</sup>

Having said that, the **EINHEITSGEMEINDEN**'s criticism against **CHABAD**'s Orthodox philosophy is somewhat inconsistent since most of the communities are already led according to traditional Jewish rite. The conflict between **CHABAD** and the **ZENTRALRAT** should therefore also be seen as reflecting the **EINHEITSGEMEINDEN**'s fear of losing connection to (potential) community members and, ultimately, sharing public funding. More optimistic voices, furthermore, have expressed the impression that **CHABAD** rabbis were less conservative and more open to Jewish diversity in Germany than their image implied. According to Micha Brumlik, a public figure of the Progressive Movement, **CHABAD** was an indispensable part of Jewish life in Germany and played a positive role in offering Jewish learning for immigrants from the former Soviet Union.<sup>169</sup>

<sup>163</sup> Yehuda Sugar: "Berlin Jewish High School Takes Top Honors in German Capital", Chabag.org, July 11, 2018, [www.chabad.org/news/article\\_cdo/aid/4078871/jewish/Berlin-Jewish-High-School-Takes-Top-Honors-in-German-Capital.htm](http://www.chabad.org/news/article_cdo/aid/4078871/jewish/Berlin-Jewish-High-School-Takes-Top-Honors-in-German-Capital.htm); Friedrich Conradi: "Die schlaueste Schule Berlins: Was ist das Erfolgsgeheimnis?", *Berliner Zeitung*, 28 June, 2021, [www.berliner-zeitung.de/news/die-schlaueste-schule-berlins-was-ist-das-erfolgsgeheimnis-li.168034](http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/news/die-schlaueste-schule-berlins-was-ist-das-erfolgsgeheimnis-li.168034).

<sup>164</sup> Homolka: „Jüdische Organisationen“, p. 604.

<sup>165</sup> [www.chabadberlin.de/templates/articlecco\\_cdo/aid/2352684/jewish/Chabad-Berlin.htm](http://www.chabadberlin.de/templates/articlecco_cdo/aid/2352684/jewish/Chabad-Berlin.htm).

<sup>166</sup> Eva-Maria Schrage: *Jüdische Religion in Deutschland: Säkularität, Traditionsbewahrung und Erneuerung*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2019, p. 53. See also Ayala Goldmann: "Segen oder Sekte? Angehende Rabbiner studieren im Jüdischen Bildungszentrum Chabad in Berlin", *Deutschlandfunk*, 14 December, 2012, [www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/seggen-oder-sekte-100.html](http://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/seggen-oder-sekte-100.html).

<sup>167</sup> Goldmann: "Segen oder Sekte?"

<sup>168</sup> Benedikt Scherm: "'Wo es Coca-Cola gibt, da gibt es auch Chabad'. Einblicke in die orthodoxe Community in Hamburg", *fink. Hamburg*, 16 November, 2021, <https://fink.hamburg/2021/11/wo-es-coca-cola-gibt-da-gibt-es-auch-chabad/>; Michael Hollenbach: "Chabad möchte Juden zu orthodoxen Juden machen", *Deutschlandfunk*, 25 June, 2015, [www.deutschlandfunk.de/deutschland-chabad-moechte-juden-zu-orthodoxen-juden-machen-100.html](http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/deutschland-chabad-moechte-juden-zu-orthodoxen-juden-machen-100.html).

<sup>169</sup> Micha Brumlik: "Bewahrer des jüdischen Erbes", *TAZ*, 30 May, 2018, <https://taz.de/Kommentar-Chabad-Bewegung/15509078/>. Brumlik's view on religious pluralism is shared by a case study on the Jewish community of Copenhagen. Andrew Buckser: "Chabad in Copenhagen: Fundamentalism and Modernity in Jewish Denmark", *Ethnology*, 44(2), 2005, pp. 125–145. On Chabad's attractiveness to Russian-speaking Jews, see Joshua Tapper: "'This Is Who I Would Become': Russian Jewish Immigrants and Their Encounters with Chabad-Lubavitch in the Greater Toronto Area", *Canadian Jewish Studies*, 29, 2020, pp. 57–80.

In Germany, school attendance is compulsory, and private and religious schools have to become publicly accredited. Thus, Jewish schools in Germany are oriented towards the basic public school curriculum and partly maintained by governmental funds. Next to the general education which qualifies pupils to take German middle or high school examinations, Jewish education is conveyed in additional classes. Most Jewish schools in Germany are open to non-Jewish pupils and children of a Jewish father. According to information provided by the ZENTRALRAT, there are nine Jewish primary schools and seven middle and high schools in seven German cities, which provide education for more than 2,000 pupils.<sup>170</sup> Whereas in Berlin with its five Jewish schools there is a variety of organisations supplying Jewish school education, namely MASROTI E.V., LAUDER FOUNDATION, CHABAD and the EINHEITSGEMEINDE, in all the other German cities Jewish schools are usually run under the flag of the EINHEITSGEMEINDE. The same is true for Jewish kindergartens. Here the EINHEITSGEMEINDEN cooperate with local German social welfare and also Christian organisations or Jewish parent initiatives. There are 20 Jewish kindergartens in 18 German cities. In the East German cities Leipzig, Chemnitz and Dresden there are Jewish kindergarten groups integrated into general public institutions. A team of German and Israeli scholars concluded in 2013 that “Jewish education in Germany is on the rise—both with respect to the number of institutions and the diversity of offerings.”<sup>171</sup> This trend is carrying on today.

Despite the above-outlined organisational pluralisation since the early 2000s, there remains an “institutional dominance by Jewish orthodoxy”.<sup>172</sup> While most Jews in Germany are living a secular or non-Orthodox lifestyle, most “of the communities are run or maintained according to Orthodox rites and rituals. True, Progressive (Reform) and Conservative Judaism have been able to make some inroads, but in quantitative as well qualitative terms, the inroads of streams such as ‘Chabad Orthodoxy’ have been far more spectacular,” says the historian and Jewish writer Michael Wolffsohn.<sup>173</sup> Most rabbis in Germany employed by the EINHEITSGEMEINDE communities are Orthodox.<sup>174</sup> The number of Orthodox and non-Orthodox rabbis has, however, been converging during the last few years. Today the ORTHODOXE RABBINERKONFERENZ, which was founded in 2003 and has its seat in Cologne, has 45 members. The ALLGEMEINE RABBINERKONFERENZ (General Conference of Rabbis) includes 36 rabbis and rabbas, of which 10 are women.<sup>175</sup> The ALLGEMEINE RABBINERKONFERENZ was founded in 2005 and is located in Berlin. It gathers rabbis from conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist and other non-Orthodox Jewish streams. As the ORTHODOXE RABBINERKONFERENZ, it is associated with the ZENTRALRAT.

In her sociological study *THE JEWISH RELIGION IN GERMANY* published in 2019, Eva-Maria Strange describes the current religious situation in German-Jewish communities as “orthodox pragmatism”. According to Strange, the practice of the EINHEITSGEMEINDE has institutionalised Jewish orthodoxy as a version of Judaism conceived as being especially authentic. Thus, Jewish orthodoxy, next to the state of Israel and the shared awareness of the Holocaust, constitutes one of the three institutional pillars defining Jewish identity in Germany today.<sup>176</sup> The German EINHEITSGEMEINDEN conceptualise the Jewish community as carriers of that Orthodox tradition and assign religious authority to Orthodox rabbis and religious teachers. On the other hand, the EINHEITSGEMEINDE’s orthodoxy remains pragmatic in the sense that it does not expect from its members a religious way of life; i.e., practising Halakha. Thus, the EINHEITSGEMEINDE represents a compromise between

<sup>170</sup> Maximilian Perseke: “Lernen in der ‘Bubble’. Einblicke in den Alltag in einer besonders konservativen jüdischen Schule in Berlin”, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 24 January, 2019, [www.fr.de/politik/einblicke-alltag-einer-besonders-konservativen-juedischen-schule-berlin-11474180.html](http://www.fr.de/politik/einblicke-alltag-einer-besonders-konservativen-juedischen-schule-berlin-11474180.html).

<sup>171</sup> Ben Rafael, Glöckner and Sternberg: *Jews and Jewish Education*, p. 113.

<sup>172</sup> Wolffsohn: “Jews in Divided Germany”, p. 28.

<sup>173</sup> Wolffsohn: “Jews in Divided Germany”, p. 28.

<sup>174</sup> Schrage: *Jüdische Religion in Deutschland*, p. 64.

<sup>175</sup> <http://a-r-k.de/rabbiner/>.

<sup>176</sup> Doron Kiesel: “Im Westen viel Neues! Zur Integration der jüdischen Zuwanderer aus der ehemaligen Sowjetunion in Deutschland”, in: Belkin and Gross (Eds), *Ausgerechnet Deutschland!*, p. 93.

Jewish communality and individual freedom, between conserving Jewish tradition and integrating all Jews, including atheists, into the institution of the community.<sup>177</sup> This compromise provokes conflicts. Some critics from the liberal faction speak of “pseudo orthodoxy”,<sup>178</sup> given the gap between the ritual leadership and the member’s way of life.

In fact, most Jews living in Germany do not consider themselves Orthodox. According to an opinion poll published in 2010 by a mixed Israeli–German research team, 13.2% of the surveyed Jews were Orthodox (including ultra-Orthodox), 32.2% defined themselves as traditional, 22.3% were assigned to liberal Judaism and 32.3% were secular.<sup>179</sup> These numbers have been updated by the GEMEINDEBAROMETER, a recent opinion poll conducted in 2019 on behalf of the ZENTRALRAT. According to this poll, 15% of the community members identify as Orthodox, 37% as traditional, 27% as liberal and 16% as culturally Jewish. The GEMEINDEBAROMETER distinguishes its findings between Jewish community members, ex-members and Jews who never have become a member of the Jewish community (e.g., because they are patrilineal Jews). Unsurprisingly, among the two latter groups the share of less traditional Jewish identifications is much higher. Only 8% of ex-members identify as Orthodox, whereas 31% identify as liberal and 26% as culturally Jewish. Among non-members, 35% identify as liberal and 33% as culturally Jewish.<sup>180</sup> These numbers already indicate the collision of interests between the “Jews on the ground” and the community structure, and hint at the ZENTRALRAT’s motivation to survey its members.

The main reason to conduct the GEMEINDEBAROMETER was the steady decrease in the number of community members. From 2006 to 2020, the number of Jews affiliated to the communities dropped from a peak of 107,794 to 93,695 individuals. Hence, the communities are worried about their sustainability and hope to find answers about making membership more attractive for former immigrants, Jews in mixed marriages and young parents. Another subject motivating the poll was the integration of the many patrilineal Jews living in Germany who cannot become community members without formal conversion. Regarding these questions, the poll has revealed what observers had already assumed. Secular and liberal community members, young Jews and Jews with non-Jewish family members do not identify with the Orthodox style of the EINHEITSGEMEINDEN. According to the poll, 50% of community members feel that non-Jewish family members are not welcome in the communities. Among ex-members and non-members, more than 70% are of that opinion.<sup>181</sup> Half of the ex- and non-members said that in the communities they did not feel accepted for what they are. Reasons for that feeling are manifold. As factors mentioned by the GEMEINDEBAROMETER-participants, the survey lists sexual orientation, age, non-Jewish family members, prejudices against Russian-speaking members by veteran members of the community, or the lack of identification with either liberal or Orthodox Judaism. Strikingly, around half of all three groups did or do not participate in community activities because community events were/are too religious for them.<sup>182</sup> Asked why they do take part in community activities, members of all three groups answered that they wish to practice their Jewish faith and to learn more about Judaism, that they were looking for cultural entertainment and wanted to get to know new people, and they wanted their children to

<sup>177</sup> Schrage: *Jüdische Religion in Deutschland*, pp. 64 and 83.

<sup>178</sup> Schrage: *Jüdische Religion in Deutschland*, p. 27.

<sup>179</sup> Eliezer Ben-Rafael, Yitzhak Sternberg and Olaf Glöckner, “Juden und jüdische Bildung im heutigen Deutschland”, available online at JPR, <https://archive.jpr.org.uk/download?id=2652>, p. 46.

<sup>180</sup> Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland: *Gemeindebarometer*, 2019, [www.zentralratderjuden.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/pdfs/Wichtige\\_Dokumente/Gemeindebarometer\\_Online.pdf](http://www.zentralratderjuden.de/fileadmin/user_upload/pdfs/Wichtige_Dokumente/Gemeindebarometer_Online.pdf), p. 16.

<sup>181</sup> *Gemeindebarometer*, p. 21, fig. 9.

<sup>182</sup> *Gemeindebarometer*, p. 29, fig. 15.



meet with other Jewish kids. Political commitment was another motive for participating in Jewish community events.<sup>183</sup>

Another important outcome of the **GEMEINDEBAROMETER** is the documentation of the will to create and help shape community activities among Jews in Germany. Thirty-five per cent of members and around 47% of ex- and non-members said that they were creating their own Jewish spaces independently from Jewish life in the communities.<sup>184</sup> Only 50% of community members said they felt their voice was heard in the community; among ex-members it was only 30%. Dissatisfaction with the community leaderships was expressed relatively often.<sup>185</sup> These views accompany a trend of individualisation among Jews.<sup>186</sup> In the **GEMEINDEBAROMETER**, all three groups agreed (75%) that they would like to have more attractive community activities.<sup>187</sup> Around 40% said they missed activities and events with people in a similar stage of life or living in similar circumstances, such as single parents, students, divorced people, Russian speakers, German speakers, single people, etc.<sup>188</sup>

**ZENTRALRAT** functionaries concluded from the survey that the communities had to improve their “welcoming culture” towards members and non-members alike. The communities should involve their members more in the organisation of community life and improve their transparency. Community leaders and employees should treat members and newcomers with open minds regarding the variety of Jewish lifestyles, backgrounds and denominations.<sup>189</sup> Less decisive is the **ZENTRALRAT**’s conclusion towards non-members with a Jewish father whereas patrilineal participants of the **GEMEINDEBAROMETER** were quite straight about their interest in community life. They asked for a more relaxed conversion procedure for patrilineal Jews (70%) and asked for an increased amount of transparent information about the necessary steps regarding conversion (60%).<sup>190</sup> The **ZENTRALRAT** has reacted towards this finding non-bindingly by stating that patrilineal Jews will be “a big topic regarding shaping the future” of the Jewish communities.<sup>191</sup>

In sum, the Jewish community poll conducted by the **ZENTRALRAT** is the first initiative of the **EINHEITSGEMEINDE** to survey its members on a large scale and, more importantly, to let community members speak for themselves. Thus, the **GEMEINDEBAROMETER** can be interpreted as a sign that the **ZENTRALRAT** realised the necessity of softening its top-down approach and adding a bottom-up perspective to community politics.

## POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

The central political representation for Jewish concerns in Germany is the **ZENTRALRAT** on the federal level and the **EINHEITSGEMEINDE** on the local level. They unite Jews with a political and administrative entity to ease negotiations with non-Jewish partners in mainstream society. According to its mission statement, the **ZENTRALRAT** is the leading political organisation for the Jewish community in Germany.<sup>192</sup> It aims to represent

<sup>183</sup> Gemeindebarometer, p. 27, fig. 14.

<sup>184</sup> Gemeindebarometer, p. 32, fig. 19.

<sup>185</sup> Gemeindebarometer, p. 22.

<sup>186</sup> A trend that has been recognised already in older studies. See Christine Müller: *Zur Bedeutung von Religion für jüdische Jugendliche in Deutschland*, Münster: Waxmann Verlag, 2007, p. 276.

<sup>187</sup> Gemeindebarometer, p. 21, fig. 9.

<sup>188</sup> Gemeindebarometer, p. 30.

<sup>189</sup> Gemeindebarometer, p. 54ff.

<sup>190</sup> Gemeindebarometer, p. 45.

<sup>191</sup> Heide Sobotka: “Eine Aufgabe für alle”, *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 26 November, 2020, [www.juedische-allgemeine.de/meinung/eine-aufgabe-fuer-alle/?q=gemeindebarometer](http://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/meinung/eine-aufgabe-fuer-alle/?q=gemeindebarometer).

<sup>192</sup> Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland: *Tätigkeitsbericht (2019.2020)*, Berlin: Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland, 2020, p. 4.

the “political, social and religious interests” of Jews towards general society.<sup>193</sup> Furthermore, it wants to serve as an advisor on Jewish life in Germany for the general public and non-Jewish political and cultural institutions.<sup>194</sup>

According to its recent activity report, the ZENTRALRAT’S most urgent political concern involved its activities against antisemitism. Public expression of antisemitic ideology had been on a rise due to the anonymous conditions of social media. In 2021, the police statistics of antisemitic incidents reported a peak of more than 3,000 registered verbal and physical anti-Jewish hate crimes (2019: 2,000; 2021: 2,300).<sup>195</sup> The overwhelming majority of the perpetrators belonged to the right-wing political spectrum.<sup>196</sup> The coronavirus crisis pushed antisemitic conspiracy theories and Holocaust relativisation, comparing coronavirus sanctions with wearing the yellow badge implemented by the Nazis in 1941, for instance. The antisemitic and anti-Muslim terror attacks in Halle in 2019 and in Hanau in 2020, both committed by white supremacists, shocked the Jewish community and prompted calls for additional security and anti-discrimination measures.

After the deadly attack on a Yom Kippur service in Halle, the federal government and the ZENTRALRAT agreed on a one-time payment additional to the STAATSVETRAG of 22 million euros to finance security measures in the communities and synagogues. Furthermore, representatives of the ZENTRALRAT took part in consultations with the German federal and local governments to improve jurisdictional sanctions against antisemitism. The ZENTRALRAT also initiated negotiations with large social media companies to raise awareness against online antisemitism. In October 2018, four local research and documentation bureaus against antisemitism founded a federal umbrella organisation, BUNDESVERBAND RIAS E.V. The association was joined by three further local branches in 2020 and 2021. RIAS E.V. records antisemitic incidents, advises victims and develops nationwide standards for gathering information on everyday antisemitism in Germany. RIAS E.V. is financed by public funds and is a cooperative initiative of different foundations from civil society and academic institutes. The ZENTRALRAT is part of the executive body. Besides these direct measures against antisemitism, the ZENTRALRAT was involved in educational programmes to prevent antisemitic prejudices.<sup>197</sup>

Another topic of Jewish interest on the agenda of the ZENTRALRAT is religious freedom. The ZENTRALRAT stands up for maintaining the legal status quo on ritual animal slaughter and circumcision. In 2019, it protested against criminalising animal slaughter without stupefaction, a draft bill that had been handed in by the Christian Democratic Party in the local parliament of Lower Saxony. The ZENTRALRAT has also negotiated with German universities to avoid examinations on Saturdays.<sup>198</sup>

It can be seen as a principle in the actions of the ZENTRALRAT to avoid interference in party politics and to remain in good relationships with all German parties. Before the election in 2021, the ZENTRALRAT made an exception from this rule in the case of the right-wing party ALTERNATIVE FÜR DEUTSCHLAND (AFD). The ZENTRALRAT and with it 60 Jewish organisations in Germany called on German voters to not give their voice to the right-wing party. The weekly JÜDISCHE ALLGEMEINE, which also undersigned the call, is Germany’s most read Jewish newspaper and financed by the ZENTRALRAT. It explained the Jewish boycott against the AFD: “We

<sup>193</sup> Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland: *Tätigkeitsbericht*, p. 4.

<sup>194</sup> Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland: *Tätigkeitsbericht*.

<sup>195</sup> Frank Jansen: “Judenhasser verüben 2021 mehr als 3000 Straftaten – vier Menschen sterben”, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 17 February, 2022, [www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/hochststand-bei-antisemitischer-kriminalitaet-judenhasser-verueben-2021-mehr-als-3000-straftaten-vier-menschen-sterben/28077846.html](http://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/hochststand-bei-antisemitischer-kriminalitaet-judenhasser-verueben-2021-mehr-als-3000-straftaten-vier-menschen-sterben/28077846.html).

<sup>196</sup> “Polizei registriert mehr als 2.000 antisemitische Straftaten”, *Zeit Online*, 11 February, 2021, [www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/2021-02/judenfeindlichkeit-straftaten-antisemitismus-polizei-gewalttaten-deutschland-bundesregierung](http://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/2021-02/judenfeindlichkeit-straftaten-antisemitismus-polizei-gewalttaten-deutschland-bundesregierung).

<sup>197</sup> Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland: *Tätigkeitsbericht*, p. 19ff.

<sup>198</sup> Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland: *Tätigkeitsbericht*, p. 21.

do not talk to politicians whose party is larded with right-wing extremists from the local branch to the national parliament.”<sup>199</sup>

According to anthropologist Dani Kranz, activism in party politics is uncommon among German Jews.<sup>200</sup> In fact, however, some “Jewish effects” on German party politics can be observed since the Jewish population growth in the 1990s. In 2007, the **ARBEITSKREIS JÜDISCHER SOZIALDEMOKRATINEN UND SOZIALDEMOKRATEN** (Union of Jewish Social Democrats) came out of the **SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (SPD)** in 2007. The group was initiated by Sergey Lagodinsky, who immigrated to Germany in 1993 from Russia and is now a member of the European Parliament for the **GREEN PARTY**. In 2016, he ran for the post of head of the Jewish community in Berlin but was defeated. The **ARBEITSKREIS** brings together Jewish Social Democrats from different Jewish backgrounds to form a common Jewish voice within the social-democratic movement which looks back on a long tradition of Jewish members. According to its mission statement, the **ARBEITSKREIS** wants to comment on contemporary issues and events from an emancipated Jewish perspective.<sup>201</sup> The **ARBEITSKREIS** possesses a functional committee structure but, as can be judged by its home page, is of marginal political influence.<sup>202</sup> Nevertheless, in comparison with other Jewish party-affiliated groups its members and ex-members are relatively visible within mainstream and Jewish media expressing positions on intra-Jewish topics like conversion and community leadership, but also on federal and international questions such as multiple citizenship for immigrants, German–Israeli relations, Germany’s cooperation with Iran or her politics of memory towards Jewish history and the Holocaust.<sup>203</sup>

In May 2018, Jews within the **CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY (CDU/CSU)** founded local **JÜDISCHE FOREN** (Jewish forums) within their party. The first branch was established in Bavaria by the German Jew André Freud, who is also Chief Executive of the Jewish community of Nuremberg. The forum subscribes to Germany’s so-called “Christian-Jewish values” and is partly led by the Bavarian commissioner for Jewish life and against antisemitism, who is Catholic.<sup>204</sup> According to the mission statement of the Baden-Württemberg branch of the **JÜDISCHES FORUM**, the forum identifies as a non-partisan, interconfessional platform for dialogue.<sup>205</sup> So far, it has not attracted public attention beyond its inaugural events.<sup>206</sup>

Some months later in 2018, the right-wing extremist party **AFD** declared the establishment of a Jewish group, **JUDEN IN DER AFD**. The event has gained much public attention, especially within the Jewish community, which reacted rigorously with a position paper “No Alternative for Jews” undersigned by 42 Jewish organisations.<sup>207</sup> According to its mission statement, **JUDEN IN DER AFD** wants to provide Jewish representation as an alternative

<sup>199</sup> Philipp Peyman Engel: “Warum wir nicht mit der AfD sprechen”, *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 12 September, 2019, [www.juedische-allgemeine.de/meinung/warum-wir-nicht-mit-der-afd-sprechen/](http://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/meinung/warum-wir-nicht-mit-der-afd-sprechen/).

<sup>200</sup> Kranz: “Forget Israel”, p. 13.

<sup>201</sup> <https://akjs.spd.de/wir-ueber-uns/>.

<sup>202</sup> <https://akjs.spd.de/wir-ueber-uns/>.

<sup>203</sup> Grigori Lagodinsky: “Frischer Wind für die jüdischen Gemeinden”, *weld.de*, 7 February, 2010, [www.welt.de/debatte/kommentare/article6289549/Frischer-Wind-fuer-die-juedischen-Gemeinden.html](http://www.welt.de/debatte/kommentare/article6289549/Frischer-Wind-fuer-die-juedischen-Gemeinden.html); “Doppelpass mit halber Wirkung”, *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 31 March, 2014, [www.juedische-allgemeine.de/politik/doppelpass-mit-halber-wirkung/](http://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/politik/doppelpass-mit-halber-wirkung/); Abraham de Wolf: “Paulskirche Juden nicht vergessen!”, *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 10 March, 2022, [www.juedische-allgemeine.de/meinung/paulskirche-juden-nicht-vergessen/](http://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/meinung/paulskirche-juden-nicht-vergessen/); Sergey Lagodinsky: “Die Kategorie der Freiheit”, 2 June, 2021, <https://lagodinsky.de/2021/06/02/die-kategorie-der-freiheit/>.

<sup>204</sup> [www.csu.de/partei/partearbeit/foren/juedisches-forum-in-der-union/ueber-uns/](http://www.csu.de/partei/partearbeit/foren/juedisches-forum-in-der-union/ueber-uns/).

<sup>205</sup> CDU Baden-Württemberg gründet Jüdisches Forum, 20 March, 2019, [www.cdu-bw.de/presse/cdu-baden-wuerttemberg-gruendet-juedisches-forum/](http://www.cdu-bw.de/presse/cdu-baden-wuerttemberg-gruendet-juedisches-forum/).

<sup>206</sup> Hans-Ulrich Dillmann: “‘Sich nicht verstecken’. Karin Prien ist Ministerin in Kiel und aktiv im Jüdischen Forum”, *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 9 July, 2018, [www.juedische-allgemeine.de/politik/sich-nicht-verstecken/](http://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/politik/sich-nicht-verstecken/).

<sup>207</sup> [www.zentralratderjuden.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/pdfs/Gemeinsame Erklarung gegen die AfD .pdf](http://www.zentralratderjuden.de/fileadmin/user_upload/pdfs/Gemeinsame_Erklaerung_gegen_die_AfD.pdf).

to the **ZENTRALRAT**, the legitimacy of which it is questioning. **JUDEN IN DER AFD** wants to express opinions allegedly “repressed” in the **ZENTRALRAT**.<sup>208</sup> Its members subscribe to “Germanness” and “occidental” culture, and reject Muslim immigration and “exaggerated” memory of the Holocaust. The group, which has about 24 members, is led by a member of a Jewish community in Bavaria, who immigrated as a child from Ukraine to Germany in 1998. In contrast to the Jewish **ARBEITSKREIS** of the **SPD**, and **JÜDISCHES FORUM**, **JUDEN IN DER AFD** maintains a home page and a well-updated Facebook account (with 13,000 followers).<sup>209</sup> It reaches out with polemics against coronavirus vaccination, antisemitism in parties of the so-called “left-wing mainstream” and left-wing anti-Zionism. According to social scientist Gideon Botsch of the **MOSES MENDELSSOHN ZENTRUM** in Potsdam, an expert in right-wing extremism, the group was initiated in a top-down manner by the non-Jewish party leadership and mainly serves as an image boost and a fig-leaf for antisemitism and nationalist ideology in the party. The group did not add a Jewish perspective to the politics of the main party but rather buttressed its right-wing dogma.<sup>210</sup>

Despite the media visibility of **JUDEN IN DER AFD**, Jewish voters have backed away from the AFD since its trivialisation of historical National Socialism and its links with the neo-Nazi scene became publicly known in 2018.<sup>211</sup> According to political observers from the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, Jewish voters in Germany tend to favour centre-left or centre-right parties like the **SPD**, **CDU**, **FDP** (Free Democratic Party) and **GREEN PARTY**, which promise democratic stability. During the last federal elections, Jewish voters considered topics like Germany’s rising antisemitism, German–Israeli relations and pensions for aging Soviet immigrants.<sup>212</sup> Germany has been accepting more than a million refugees and immigrants from Muslim countries since 2015,<sup>213</sup> and Jews express concern about antisemitism “imported” from Muslim countries.<sup>214</sup> For this kind of Jewish voter, parties with a less friendly immigration program like the **CDU/CSU** and **FDP** will be an alternative to the criticised AFD. The **ZENTRALRAT** has mobilised Jews in Germany to vote for democratic parties and has explicitly warned against voting for the AFD. According to well-researched press reports, about 30% to 40% of former Jewish **KONTINGENTFLÜCHTLINGE** from Russian-speaking countries are not allowed to vote in the German federal elections since they lack German citizenship.<sup>215</sup>

Besides the **ZENTRALRAT** and the above-mentioned party-affiliated Jewish groups, there are further Jewish organisations, lobby groups and organisations in civil society which have been founded within the last decade. According to anthropologist Dani Kranz, the Jewish youth in the 1960s and 1970s did not see its future in Germany and, thus, did not engage in German politics. Younger Jewish generations, however, started engaging in politics in order to channel their criticism towards German antisemitism and Germans’ historical amnesia of their Nazi past.<sup>216</sup> Today, the scope of topics has broadened.

<sup>208</sup> Gideon Botsch: “Die ‘Juden in der AfD’ und der Antisemitismus”, *Mitteilungen der Emil Julius Gumbel Forschungsstelle. Moses Mendelssohn Zentrum für europäisch-jüdische Studien* (April 2020), Nr. 7.

<sup>209</sup> See [j-afd.org/](http://j-afd.org/) and [www.facebook.com/JudeninderAfD/](https://www.facebook.com/JudeninderAfD/).

<sup>210</sup> Botsch: “Die ‘Juden in der AfD’”.

<sup>211</sup> Botsch: “Die ‘Juden in der AfD’”.

<sup>212</sup> Joe Baur: “After Merkel: Antisemitism and Israel Ties on Jewish Minds as Germany Votes”, *Times of Israel*, 25 September, 2021, [www.timesofisrael.com/antisemitism-israel-ties-in-the-mix-for-jewish-voters-as-germany-heads-to-polls/](https://www.timesofisrael.com/antisemitism-israel-ties-in-the-mix-for-jewish-voters-as-germany-heads-to-polls/).

<sup>213</sup> Susanne Worbs, Nina Rother and Axel Kreienbrink: “Syrische Migranten in Deutschland als bedeutsame neue Bevölkerungsgruppe”, *Informationsdienst Soziale Indikatoren*, 61, pp. 2–6, <https://doi.org/10.15464/isi.61.2019.2-6>.

<sup>214</sup> Jens Rosbach: “Jüdische Wähler. Sympathien gegenüber der AfD – und Warnungen”, *Deutschlandfunk*, 21 September, 2017, [www.deutschlandfunk.de/juedische-waehler-sympathien-gegenueber-der-afd-und-100.html](http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/juedische-waehler-sympathien-gegenueber-der-afd-und-100.html).

<sup>215</sup> Rosbach: “Jüdische Wähler”.

<sup>216</sup> Kranz, “Innenansichten: Judendamals, Israelis heute”, p. 43.

Traditionally, Jewish leaders in Germany express a strong identification with Israel, and the Jewish community has developed a high awareness for Israel-centred antisemitism. The ZENTRALRAT, for example, in its recent activity report emphasised the special relationship between Jews in Germany and Israel, supported initiatives improving Israel's image and backed the German Parliament's decision to forbid Hezbollah (in April 2020) and to classify Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions group (BDS) as antisemitic and to not finance organisations cooperating with BDS (in May 2019).<sup>217</sup> Although the ZENTRALRAT expresses clear expectations towards Germany's politics regarding Israel,<sup>218</sup> it concentrates its activities on Jewish domestic concerns. The federal Zionist organisation the ZIONISTISCHE ORGANISATION DEUTSCHLANDS (Germany's Zionist Organisation) seems to have disappeared from the political scene. Instead, two lobby groups entered the political landscape in the 2000s. In 2009, NAHOST FRIEDENSFORUM E.V. NAFFO (Middle East Forum for Peace) was founded. NAFFO is a political lobby group trying to improve Israel's international standing via establishing close contacts with political decision makers. It offers journeys to Israel and organises dinners for members of the German Parliament and discussion events with diplomats.<sup>219</sup> NAFFO does not identify as Jewish but works closely together and overlaps partly in its leading staff with the WERTEINITIATIVE. JÜDISCH-DEUTSCHE POSITIONEN (Initiative for Values: Jewish German Standpoints) founded in 2014. Before the German election in 2017, WERTEINITIATIVE started as a loose affiliation of Jewish public figures and was consolidated a year later. According to its mission statement, WERTEINITIATIVE works towards stabilising democratic values and sets its focus on fighting Islamism and other kinds of political extremism. Like NAFFO, WERTEINITIATIVE finances its activities with private donations; however, it is also partly subsidised by the German Home Office. According to a report by a leading German mainstream weekly, the resolution against BDS adopted by the German Federal Parliament in May 2019 came about thanks to the initiative of functionaries connected to both organisations.<sup>220</sup> In this report WERTEINITIATIVE was criticised for its unusual radical lobbyism; the ZENTRALRAT came to the organisation's defence and identified the publication as nurturing the legend of a Jewish conspiracy.<sup>221</sup>

A group of a completely different political style and perspective is JEWISH ANTIFASCIST ACTION BERLIN. JEWISH ANTIFA BERLIN entered the public arena in 2017 and holds radical anti-Zionist views. According to press reports, the group was founded by Israeli immigrants and has no more than 20 followers.<sup>222</sup> JEWISH ANTIFA BERLIN is part of the radical left-wing grassroots movement but sees itself at the margins of the antifascist movement in Germany. In fact, in international comparisons the German left tends to be more Israel-friendly, pro-Western and pro-American. Memory of the Holocaust and work against contemporary German antisemitism are important parts of antifascist activism in Germany. In relation to that, JEWISH ANTIFA BERLIN holds the view that its anti-imperial, anti-Zionist and pro-Palestinian positions are being repressed by non-Jewish German left-wing groups. JEWISH ANTIFA BERLIN, which supports the BDS movement, says that German left-wing groups

<sup>217</sup> [www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2019/kw20-de-bds-642892](http://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2019/kw20-de-bds-642892).

<sup>218</sup> Joseph Schuster: "Gute und wichtige Zeichen im Koalitionsvertrag", *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 2 December, 2021, [www.juedische-allgemeine.de/politik/koalitionsvertrag-gute-und-wichtige-zeichen/](http://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/politik/koalitionsvertrag-gute-und-wichtige-zeichen/).

<sup>219</sup> <https://naffo.de/aktivitaeten/>.

<sup>220</sup> Matthias Gebauer, Ann-Katrin Müller, Sven Röbel, Raniah Salloum, Christoph Schult and Christoph Sydow: "Lobbyismus im Bundestag Wie zwei Vereine die deutsche Nahostpolitik beeinflussen wollen", *Der Spiegel*, 12 July, 2019, [www.spiegel.de/politik/lobbyismus-im-bundestag-wie-zwei-vereine-die-deutsche-nahostpolitik-beeinflussen-wollen-a-00000000-0002-0001-0000-000164871539](http://www.spiegel.de/politik/lobbyismus-im-bundestag-wie-zwei-vereine-die-deutsche-nahostpolitik-beeinflussen-wollen-a-00000000-0002-0001-0000-000164871539).

<sup>221</sup> Gebauer et al.: "Lobbyismus"; "Anmerkungen zu unserer Recherche für den Artikel 'Gezielte Kampagne'", *Spiegel*, 15 July, 2019, [www.spiegel.de/politik/anmerkungen-zu-unserer-recherche-fuer-den-artikel-gezielte-kampagne-a-0960bc5e-2bc4-485d-8dde-5ff0cdded5db](http://www.spiegel.de/politik/anmerkungen-zu-unserer-recherche-fuer-den-artikel-gezielte-kampagne-a-0960bc5e-2bc4-485d-8dde-5ff0cdded5db); "Das Gerücht von der jüdischen Lobby", *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 13 July, 2019, [www.juedische-allgemeine.de/politik/das-geruecht-von-der-juedischesen-lobby/?q=werteinitiative](http://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/politik/das-geruecht-von-der-juedischesen-lobby/?q=werteinitiative).

<sup>222</sup> Michael Wuliger: "Die 'Jewish Antifa Berlin' macht Karriere", *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 30 July, 2018, [www.juedische-allgemeine.de/kultur/fake-news-aus-neukoelln/](http://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/kultur/fake-news-aus-neukoelln/).

cooperate with the Israeli Embassy or with Hasbara organisations.<sup>223</sup> The group maintains a Facebook account and takes part in demonstrations connected to its purposes.<sup>224</sup> Within the German-Jewish community, which has an Israel-friendly tendency, the group is of no influence.

This is also true for the Berlin association **JÜDISCHE STIMME** (Jewish Voice), which was founded in 2007 as the German branch of **EUROPEAN JEWS FOR A JUST PEACE**. The association supports a two-state solution, but identifies Israel as accountable for the failed realisation of a Palestinian state. Among other claims, it advocates against deliveries of German arms to Israel and supports the latest Amnesty International report on Israel's alleged apartheid system. The group is very active on Facebook, takes part in demonstrations and comments on its home page on recent developments in Germany's foreign politics and the Middle East.<sup>225</sup> It criticises the **ZENTRALRAT** for its lack of criticism on Israeli foreign politics, and the choice of its name, Jewish Voice, hints at its identity as an alternative voice to the Israel-euphoric Jewish mainstream in Germany. When **JÜDISCHE STIMME** was awarded the Göttingen Peace Price in 2019, the **ZENTRALRAT** protested against the jury's decision, pointing at the group's connection to BDS.<sup>226</sup>

Another group which joined the scene of Jewish voices is the LGBTQI organisation **KESHET E.V.** in Berlin. The association was founded in 2018, and its activities are mostly directed at the Jewish community. **KESHET** acts to improve the standing of LGBTQI Jews within the Jewish world and raise tolerance and respect for queer Jews within the Jewish communities.<sup>227</sup> Furthermore, it follows an intersectional approach, pointing at the double discrimination as potential objects of antisemitism and homophobia, and aims to raise the visibility of queer Jewishness in German mainstream society.<sup>228</sup>

A new organisation which approaches Jewish political engagement in a more academic style is the **JEWISH ACTIVISM SUMMER SCHOOL (JASS)**. **JASS** was founded in 2016 and is directed by Jonathan Schorsch. Schorsch, who is American, holds the professorship of Jewish Religious and Intellectual History at the Faculty for Jewish Theology at the University of Potsdam. According to its mission statement, the initiative represents a reaction to "the rise of openly nationalist, xenophobic, anti-democratic ruling parties in a disconcerting number of countries". **JASS** organises reading groups, workshops, summer schools and online webinars for Jews and non-Jews in Potsdam and Berlin.<sup>229</sup> It aims to offer "a serious and practical education in Jewish traditional approaches to Tikkun Olam (repairing the world), historical examples of Jewish activism, and an interdisciplinary cluster of skills and methods applicable to any issue area".<sup>230</sup>

Initiatives like **JASS** and **KESHET** are only two examples of a broader phenomenon of Jewish organisational pluralisation in Germany. According to the sociologist Anastasia Pletoukhina, more than 40 Jewish grassroots groups were founded between 2012 and 2017. They were initiated by young Jews aged 18 to 35 to create social Jewish spaces for students, young professionals and patrilineal Jews independent from umbrella organisations

<sup>223</sup> <https://jewshantifaberlin.wordpress.com/about-us/>.

<sup>224</sup> [www.facebook.com/JewishAntiFaBerlin/](https://www.facebook.com/JewishAntiFaBerlin/).

<sup>225</sup> [www.juedische-stimme.de/](http://www.juedische-stimme.de/); [www.facebook.com/12juedischestimme](https://www.facebook.com/12juedischestimme).

<sup>226</sup> "Zentralrat der Juden protestiert gegen Ehrung", *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 14 February, 2019, [www.juedische-allgemeine.de/politik/zentralrat-der-juden-protestiert-gegen-ehrung/](http://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/politik/zentralrat-der-juden-protestiert-gegen-ehrung/); "Proteste gegen Preisvergabe", *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 6 March, 2019, [www.juedische-allgemeine.de/politik/proteste-gegen-preisvergabe/?q=j%C3%BCdische%20stimme%20g%C3%Bcttingen](http://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/politik/proteste-gegen-preisvergabe/?q=j%C3%BCdische%20stimme%20g%C3%Bcttingen).

<sup>227</sup> <https://keshetdeutschland.de/vorstand>.

<sup>228</sup> Sebastian Goddemeier: "Berliner Verein 'Keshet'. 'Viele Menschen, die jüdisch und queer sind, machen negative Erfahrungen'", *Tagesspiegel*, 14 August, 2020,

[www.tagesspiegel.de/gesellschaft/queerspiegel/berliner-verein-keshet-viele-menschen-die-juedisch-und-queer-sind-machen-negative-erfahrungen/26075322.html](http://www.tagesspiegel.de/gesellschaft/queerspiegel/berliner-verein-keshet-viele-menschen-die-juedisch-und-queer-sind-machen-negative-erfahrungen/26075322.html).

<sup>229</sup> [www.facebook.com/jassberlin/](https://www.facebook.com/jassberlin/).

<sup>230</sup> [www.jassberlin.org/about](http://www.jassberlin.org/about).

such as the **EINHEITSGEMEINDE** or the **ZENTRALRAT**. The groups include Jewish cooking and dance clubs but also initiatives against antisemitism, and Jewish/non-Jewish encounter groups. Their object is to allow Jewish networking beyond matchmaking and to negotiate Jewish identity in relation to other identifications and to intensify reflection on pluralist lifestyles in contemporary society. According to Pletoukhina, the boom in Jewish organisations hints at a blank space for programmes relevant to this age group offered by the communities. Young Jews criticise the frozen structures within the communities and report a feeling of insufficient recognition, trust and autonomy shown by the older generation.<sup>231</sup> On the other hand, one can argue that Jewish grassroots organisations have the potential for conceptualising Jewish life in Germany beyond the community structures and allowing not only cultural and generational but also organisational pluralism.

While the grassroots organisations and lobby groups presented here refer to an ongoing pluralisation of Jewish political activism, they are mostly focussing on identity politics, the Middle East conflict or antisemitism. The most urgent social concern for Jews in Germany, namely the widespread old-age poverty among former Soviet-Jewish immigrants, gets less attention from individual pressure groups. In Germany, the calculation of old-age pensions for Soviet-Jewish immigrants does not recognise a former immigrant's income stemming from employment in their country of origin. Because of that regulation, around 60,000 Jewish pensioners receive only a minimum payment of social benefits. In 2018, Sergey Lagodinsky from the Green Party; Micha Brumlik, a Jewish writer and intellectual involved in several Progressive Jewish activities; and politician Volker Beck from the Green Party, who is known for his awareness in Jewish political concerns, initiated the campaign **ZEDEK**. The initiative advocates for the bureaucratic recognition of immigrants' occupational income in Germany and the implementation of a hardship fund for those who would still receive only the minimum old-age pension even after the reform. Currently, **ZEDEK** confines its activities to its social media channels, where it keeps the topic on the public agenda.<sup>232</sup> Judged by the tone of the **ZENTRALRAT**'s public statements, the leading Jewish organisation has a weak negotiating position in the matter. In 2019 and 2020 it was involved in consultations with the German government, which have so far not led to an improvement of the social situation of the affected Jewish group.<sup>233</sup> The most recent German government, established in December 2021, agreed in its coalition contract on the establishment of a hardship fund, which is the minimum demand of the **ZENTRALRAT**.<sup>234</sup> A solution will depend on the coalition partners prioritising the matter on the government's agenda and agreeing on a model for financing the additional pension payments.<sup>235</sup>

## JEWISH MEDIA AND CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS

Jewish and German mainstream media create important virtual spaces for Jewish visibility, Jewish cultural and political representations and public debate regarding intra-Jewish concerns. As the chapter above has shown, Jewish pluralisation in Germany also led to a diversified representation of Jewish concerns, voices and political organisations within civil society. Due to the traditional **EINHEITSGEMEINDE** structures and its role as a gatekeeper for public funds, the **ZENTRALRAT** manages to keep its unified representational character within the

<sup>231</sup> Anastassia Pletoukhina: "Parallele Welten oder die vielfältige Gemeinschaft? Organisationen und Initiativen jüdischer Erwachsener in Deutschland", *Jalta*, 1(2017), 1, pp. 113–120.

<sup>232</sup> [www.facebook.com/Zedek-Gerechtigkeit-369550950532185/](https://www.facebook.com/Zedek-Gerechtigkeit-369550950532185/).

<sup>233</sup> Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland: *Tätigkeitsbericht*, p. 23.

<sup>234</sup> "Josef Schuster mahnt Rentenlösung für jüdische Zuwanderer an", *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 11 November, 2021, [www.juedische-allgemeine.de/politik/josef-schuster-mahnt-rentenloesung-fuer-juedische-zuwanderer-an/?q=Sozialversicherungsabkommen](https://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/politik/josef-schuster-mahnt-rentenloesung-fuer-juedische-zuwanderer-an/?q=Sozialversicherungsabkommen); "Joseph Schuster: Gute und wichtige Zeichen im Koalitionsvertrag", *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 2 December, 2021, [www.juedische-allgemeine.de/politik/koalitionsvertrag-gute-und-wichtige-zeichen/?q=koalitionsvertrag](https://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/politik/koalitionsvertrag-gute-und-wichtige-zeichen/?q=koalitionsvertrag).

<sup>235</sup> On the latest state of the developments see Ayala Goldmann: "Rentengerechtigkeit in Aschkenas?", *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 2 June, 2022, <https://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/politik/rentengerechtigkeit-in-aschkenas/?q=h%C3%A4rtefall>.



Jewish community. In the more dynamic field of media and pop culture, however, alternative Jewish opinions and representations of Judaism are harder to keep in line. This section offers an overview of traditional and younger Jewish media products, a scene which has diversified thanks to Jewish immigration and digitisation.

The oldest national Jewish paper is *JÜDISCHE ALLGEMEINE*. The weekly was founded in 1946, and today serves as the official mouthpiece of the ZENTRALRAT. *JÜDISCHE ALLGEMEINE* is a print periodical, and its articles are also free to access online. The paper covers a wide range of Jewish domestic events and concerns in politics, culture and the Jewish communities. Rather than an intra-Jewish forum for debate, the paper should be appreciated for its role as a distributor of Jewish community news and as one of the key media representing a reliable Jewish public voice in the German newspaper landscape. Especially in its political section, much of its content consists of official announcements by the ZENTRALRAT and its leadership. Articles on Jewish, German or Israeli politics are professional but rarely investigative. Only its cultural pages and articles on history provide background material. The paper is moderately Zionist; its tone in articles on Israel is either affirmative or neutral.

According to the GEMEINDEBAROMETER, *JÜDISCHE ALLGEMEINE* is an important source of information for Jews on Jewish community life and the Jewish sphere in Germany. More than 50% of community members said they were reading it.<sup>236</sup> Its paper edition has a distribution of 10,700,<sup>237</sup> but *JÜDISCHE ALLGEMEINE* is also active on Facebook and Twitter. It mostly uses these channels to generate outreach for its website. Its home page (juedisch-allgemeine.de) has more than 300,000 visitors a month, around 200,000 of them unique visitors. According to Similarweb, which uses traffic data generated by Google Analytics, around 80% of its readers access the page from Germany, 8% from Switzerland, and 4% from both Paraguay and Austria. Fifty-six per cent of its online readership is categorised as male. Around 75% is between the ages of 18 and 44. Social media generate about 17% of *JÜDISCHE ALLGEMEINE*'s online traffic. Thirty per cent of its users access the website directly, and almost half of them enter it via search engines like Google. Users who reached juedische-allgemeine.de via search engines entered keywords hinting at a verity of interests. Top search terms in early 2022 were "Miqua", "What is free will in Judaism" and "Mitzvot for non-Jews", which hint at the paper's important role as a reliable source of information for non-Jews about basic Jewish knowledge. Even users interested in conspiracy theories end up at *JÜDISCHE ALLGEMEINE*, as one of the top search terms, "Mel Gibson Rothschild", illustrates. Another important group of users are those searching for information on Jewish pop stars or public figures who have become object of debate because of antisemitic statements.<sup>238</sup> Top topics of interest in 2021 have been the management of the coronavirus in Israel and innovations regarding medical coronavirus treatment in Israel. These findings demonstrate the paper's role as an important distributor of news and opinions about Israel and Judaism in the German language.

In addition to *JÜDISCHE ALLGEMEINE*, many Jewish communities maintain their own newsletters. Many of these publications are written in the Russian language. Some Jewish communities manage a YouTube channel.<sup>239</sup>

Besides *JÜDISCHE ALLGEMEINE* and other community media, there is a handful of edited Jewish media products which are due to private entrepreneurship or civic and intellectual initiative. In 1995, the website hagailil.com was founded by the German Jew David Gall. The website is now edited by the German-born Tel Aviv resident Andrea Livnat as a one-person newsroom, and publishes articles on Jewish life in Germany and Israel. The website's design is old-fashioned, which should not hide the fact that hagailil.com posts genuine articles every

<sup>236</sup> Gemeindebarometer, pp. 38 and 39f, fig. 25.

<sup>237</sup> [www.juedische-allgemeine.de/mediadaten/](http://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/mediadaten/).

<sup>238</sup> Similarweb: January 2022 Website Analysis juedische-allgemeine.de.

<sup>239</sup> See Community of Hanau: [www.youtube.com/channel/UCbEiOa2K2pd5gy9qv8n836w](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbEiOa2K2pd5gy9qv8n836w), Community of Düsseldorf: [www.youtube.com/channel/UCtA2QUvujVkkGxfM0bySVag](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCtA2QUvujVkkGxfM0bySVag), Community of Darmstadt: [www.youtube.com/channel/UCkD8oLYD5f9rHMG9khEKJLg](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCkD8oLYD5f9rHMG9khEKJLg) and the Community of Berlin: [www.youtube.com/channel/UCRwQ5xv2PQ1wtjTAw9JeNQ/featured](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCRwQ5xv2PQ1wtjTAw9JeNQ/featured).

day. It has a focus on Jewish history, culture and antisemitism. Hagalil.com clusters its own pool of writers and journalists, who are not compensated for their pieces but also post press releases from civil associations or the Israeli embassy. Some of its journalists work for *JÜDISCHE ALLGEMEINE* and the Israel-friendly, left-wing paper *JUNGLE WORLD*. Hagalil.com's independence from community media can be illustrated by a debate on the missing representation of Russian-speaking Jews and Russian-Jewish topics in the *ZENTRALRAT* and community leaderships in 2006. Under the headline "The Arrogance of the Ancestors", Sergey Lagodinsky published an article in the German mainstream daily *SÜDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG*, in which he blamed the established Jewish functionaries for conserving an antiquated model of a German-Jewish management culture and paternalizing the overwhelmingly Russian-Jewish membership base. While *JÜDISCHE ALLGEMEINE* observed silence on the matter, hagalil.com republished Lagodinsky's comments.<sup>240</sup>

Another Jewish press product is the monthly *JÜDISCHE RUNDSCHAU* (*Jewish Review*). *JÜDISCHE RUNDSCHAU* was founded in 2014 by the German Jew and Berlin-based entrepreneur Rafael Korenzecher. It has paper and online editions. Korenzecher's monthly editorials, which comment on the latest political events, have about 1,500 views a month. *JÜDISCHE RUNDSCHAU* maintains a populist and dystopic tone, and its political sympathies lie with right-wing politicians such as Donald Trump and Éric Zemmour. *JÜDISCHE RUNDSCHAU*'s rhetoric against Germany's so-called "established parties", a term which refers to the Green Party, SPD, CDU and FDP, is similar to views of the AFD, but the paper has not identified openly with that party.<sup>241</sup> According to its own statement, the paper broadened its readership in 2021.<sup>242</sup>

*JÜDISCHE RUNDSCHAU* is a critic of the *ZENTRALRAT*, which it labelled in autumn 2020 not as the representation of Jews but "the representation of the federal government with the Jews". *JÜDISCHE RUNDSCHAU* blames the *ZENTRALRAT* for depending financially on state funding and thus "paying court" to the federal government. The paper holds anti-immigrant views regarding Muslim immigration. One of its most important points of criticism against the *ZENTRALRAT* is that the Jewish representative body ignores the danger of so-called "imported Islamic antisemitism"<sup>243</sup> due to its "political correctness".<sup>244</sup> Police statistics, however, reveal that antisemitic attacks in Germany are overwhelmingly committed by Germans from the right-wing spectrum. *JÜDISCHE RUNDSCHAU* maintains a Russian-language edition, *ЕВРЕЙСКАЯ ПАНОРАМА* (*Evrejskaja Panorama*). Its Russian online edition receives only around 100 views per article.<sup>245</sup>

Another publication cultivating an anti-establishment identity is *HAOLAM. NACHRICHTEN AUS ISRAEL, DEUTSCHLAND UND DER WELT* (*The World: News from Israel, Germany and the World*). The news portal does not present itself as a Jewish voice; however, it uses Jewish imagery in its corporate identity. It was founded by Jörg Yizrel Fischer-Aharon, a German convert to Judaism who lives in the centre of Israel.<sup>246</sup> *HAOLAM*'s political sympathies lie with conservative to right-wing authoritarian politicians and political movements. Its posts on liberal and progressive politicians or anti-coronavirus measures have a cynical and populist tone. A great part of

<sup>240</sup> Sergey Lagodinsky: "Vielfalt anerkennen. Die Arroganz der Altvorderen", hagalil.com, 27 June, 2006, [www.hagalil.com/archiv/2006/06/lagodinsky.htm](http://www.hagalil.com/archiv/2006/06/lagodinsky.htm).

<sup>241</sup> One of its authors is Chaim Noll, a German Jew residing in Israel who is associated with Juden in der AfD. Chaim Noll: "70 Jahre Zentralrat: Vertretung der Juden oder Vertretung der Bundesregierung bei den Juden?", *Jüdische Rundschau*, 10(74), Oktober, 2020, <https://juedischerundschau.de/article.2020-10.70-jahre-zentralrat-vertretung-der-juden-oder-vertretung-der-bundesregierung-bei-den-juden.html>.

<sup>242</sup> Rafael Korenzecher: "Die Kolumne des Herausgebers", *Jüdische Rundschau*, 12(88), December, 2021.

<sup>243</sup> Noll: "70 Jahre Zentralrat".

<sup>244</sup> Chaim Noll: "Der Zentralrat - für Juden wenig hilfreich", *Jüdische Rundschau*, 10(86), Oktober, 2021, <https://juedischerundschau.de/article.2021-10.der-zentralrat-fuer-juden-wenig-hilfreich.html>.

<sup>245</sup> <https://evrejskaja-panorama.de/>.

<sup>246</sup> <https://haolam.de/de/impressum/impressum.html>. On Jörg Yizrel Fischer-Aharon, see Gerald Beyrodt: "Vom Neonazi zum Israel-Erklärer", *Deutschlandfunk Kultur*, 21 January, 2011, [www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/vom-neonazi-zum-israel-erklaerer-100.html](http://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/vom-neonazi-zum-israel-erklaerer-100.html).

its content consists of reposts and German translations from other websites, such as *DIE WELTWOCH*, *ACHSE DES GUTEN* and *DIE FREIE WELT*. The latter is connected to the AFD.

An independent Jewish media project of a professional nature is *JÜDISCHES EUROPA. JÜDISCHES LEBEN IN DEUTSCHLAND, ÖSTERREICH AND FRANKREICH* (*Jewish Europe: Jewish Life in Germany, Austria and France*).<sup>247</sup> The magazine publishes genuine background articles on Jewish religion and culture. It has been published for more than 15 years and is edited by a group of media professionals. Its newsroom is located in Frankfurt on Main.

A media project of a more intellectual kind is *JALTA. POSITIONEN ZUR JÜDISCHEN GEGENWART* (*Jalta: Views on the Jewish Present*). In 2017, the semi-annual journal was founded by a group of academics, writers and artists with a Jewish background, many associated with the Jewish scholarship fund ELES. Jalta authors reflect on social pluralism, antisemitism and racism in German mainstream society. According to one of its editors, the philosopher and social scientist Hannah Peaceman, *JALTA* defines Jewishness apart from both German non-Jewish ascriptions and the Jewish conservative mainstream.<sup>248</sup> According to its mission statement, *JALTA* wants to diversify Jewish representations and not limit Jewish debate culture to the Holocaust, Israel and contemporary antisemitism.<sup>249</sup> *JALTA* identifies Jews as one group within a diverse post-migratory society and argues for building alliances between Jews, Muslims and People of Colour. After its seventh issue in 2020, the journal's editors took a break and are now continuing the publication as a yearbook.

Another important platform for Jewish debate and Jewish cultural representation is the *JEWISH MUSEUM BERLIN*. The museum was founded in 2001 and quickly developed into one of the most visited museums in Germany. According to the museum's information, 2,000 people visit it every day. The museum is state-funded, and its basic task is to provide information and education on German-Jewish history and the present. The *JEWISH MUSEUM BERLIN* is known for its innovative approaches to representations of Judaism, combining classical text and object-based exhibiting with modern art and digital media. The museum has its own academy offering events on Jewish history, and also on intercultural understanding and intellectual dialogue in a diverse society. In 2017, the *JEWISH MUSEUM BERLIN* showed a temporary exhibition on Jerusalem which was sharply criticised by the *ZENTRALRAT* and even by the Israeli prime minister for being biased against the Israeli side of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As a result of a rumbling conflict regarding the museum's Jewish identity and its vague attitude towards Israel and BDS, its former director, the non-Jewish Judaist Peter Schäfer, stepped down in 2019. His successor is the Dutch theatre scholar Hetty Berg, who is Jewish.

Jewish media history is characterised by a continuous coming and going of new projects, and many periodicals and initiatives remain ephemeral. Hoping to avoid that fate is *SPITZ*, a Hebrew magazine for Berlin. The periodical was founded in 2012 for Israeli emigrants as a tool to "help burst their bubbles" and to encourage a better understanding for German culture, history and society.<sup>250</sup> It was founded by a professional Israeli journalist who immigrated to Berlin, and started as a print magazine. It switched to an online format in 2016. *SPITZ's* website was under reconstruction and reopened with a podcast in May 2022; Spitz maintains a social media account which is updated on a regular basis.<sup>251</sup>

Most Jewish media products are characterised by a minority consciousness, always taking a less benevolent non-Jewish readership into consideration and preferring not to wash the dirty, intra-Jewish laundry in front of a non-Jewish public. This is especially true for *JÜDISCHE ALLGEMEINE*, which has to serve the *ZENTRALRAT'S* aspiration as a universal representation of Judaism in Germany. Intra-Jewish debate, therefore, is quite possible

<sup>247</sup> [www.juedisches-europa.net/about/](http://www.juedisches-europa.net/about/).

<sup>248</sup> Hannah Peaceman: "Jalta!", *Jalta. Positionen zur Jüdischen Gegenwart*, 1(2017), p. 169.

<sup>249</sup> <https://neofelis-verlag.de/verlagsprogramm/reihen/jalta>.

<sup>250</sup> Tal Alon: Bursting the Israeli Bubble, *Jewish Voice from Germany*, July 2013.

<sup>251</sup> <https://spitzmag.de/>; [www.facebook.com/SpitzMagazin](https://www.facebook.com/SpitzMagazin).

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across media and other cultural products, as shown by the example of *JÜDISCHE RUNDSCHAU* on the political right and the *JEWISH MUSEUM BERLIN* and *JALTA* on the liberal left.

Given these circumstances, Jews reach regularly out to German non-Jewish media when it comes to reporting and commenting critically on Jewish community leadership, such as nepotism or the discrimination against Russian-speaking Jews. This can be illustrated by the recent allegations of sexual misconduct and sexualised abuse at the rabbinical teaching institute *ABRAHAM GEIGER COLLEGE*. Its director, Rabbi Walter Homolka, is accused of having covered up cases of sexual abuse against rabbinical students which were allegedly committed using social media by his husband, who is also an employee of the college. Although journalists connected to leading Jewish media in Germany knew of the investigations against Walter Homolka at the University of Potsdam for several months, it was a Jewish journalist from a leading non-Jewish publication who made the accusations public.<sup>252</sup> His article also focused on Homolka's accumulation of key positions in Progressive Jewish educational institutes and foundations, which created an atmosphere of dependence and may have made the alleged cases possible. *JÜDISCHE ALLGEMEINE* covered the scandal only several days later, referring to investigations by *DIE WELT*.<sup>253</sup> This division of labour between Jewish and non-Jewish media is paradigmatic in Germany: the Jewish press avoids arguing about intra-Jewish conflicts publicly, and the non-Jewish press does not put them on the agenda, fearing accusations of antisemitic biases in their reporting. The effect is that controversial Jewish topics are dealt with on the initiative of Jewish journalists and intellectuals, who publish in the non-Jewish press.

Another even more illuminating example of this Jewish/non-Jewish media dynamic is the latest debate on patrilineal Jewishness, a topic of great political and social relevance in Germany. A public discussion on the matter took place across Jewish and non-Jewish media channels in summer 2021. The writer and political commentator Max Czollek posted on Twitter that the famous German-Jewish author Maxim Biller did not accept him as a Jew and that it was time to speak about intra-Jewish discrimination. This post, which was shared 14 times and liked 500 times, launched a months-long debate among Jewish authors on Jewish identity and Jewish representation across the most-read German mainstream papers *DIE WELT*, *DIE ZEIT*, *TAGESZEITUNG SÜDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG*, *DEUTSCHLANDFUNK* and others. Prior to this debate, Czollek had been hyped as an alternative Jewish voice by German and even American mainstream media thanks to his own PR efforts and those of his publishing house *HANSER*. In his books *De-integrate Yourselves!* (2018) and *Overcoming the Present* (2020), Czollek pleads for an empowered Jewish standpoint within German society, for a true social pluralism and for Jewish-Muslim alliances in their struggle against Germany's white Christian national identity.

Czollek's critics questioned his right to speak from a Jewish standpoint since he was "only" the grandchild of a Jewish man, a communist who had lived in the German Democratic Republic after World War II. In fact, Czollek is not halakhically Jewish, but beyond doubt he is the product of the Jewish infrastructure in Germany. He graduated from the *JEWISH HIGH SCHOOL MOSES MENDELSSOHN* in Berlin, received funding from the Jewish scholarship fund *ELES* and is one of the co-founders of *JALTA*. The conservative author Maxim Biller framed his criticism towards his left-wing colleague Czollek around the still-fraught German-Jewish relation and concentrated on the allegation that Czollek was appropriating Jewishness for his career and his liberal left-wing agenda.

<sup>252</sup> Alan Posener: "Die Methode Homolka", *Die Welt*, 8 May, 2022, [www.welt.de/kultur/plus238562571/Missbrauchsskandal-am-Potsdamer-Geiger-Kolleg-Die-Methode-Homolka.html](http://www.welt.de/kultur/plus238562571/Missbrauchsskandal-am-Potsdamer-Geiger-Kolleg-Die-Methode-Homolka.html) (the article was published first on 6 May, 2022).

<sup>253</sup> "WELT: 'Missbrauchsskandal' am Abraham Geiger Kolleg", *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 8 May, 2022, [www.juedische-allgemeine.de/politik/welt-missbrauchsskandal-am-abraham-geiger-kolleg/](http://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/politik/welt-missbrauchsskandal-am-abraham-geiger-kolleg/); Joseph Schuster: "Lückenlose Aufklärung der Vorwürfe zwingend geboten", *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 10 May, 2022, [www.juedische-allgemeine.de/unsere-woche/lueckenlose-aufklaerung-der-vorwuerfe-zwingend-geboten/](http://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/unsere-woche/lueckenlose-aufklaerung-der-vorwuerfe-zwingend-geboten/).

Other participants in the debate realised the potential of the cut and thrust between two famous Jewish authors for touching on a rumbling issue within the Jewish community, namely the large number of patrilineal Jews among the former quota refugees and their neglected integration into the Jewish communities. A particularly emotional point of discussion is the policy of **ZENTRALWOHLFAHRTSSTELLE** to not allow children of Jewish fathers to participate in Jewish vocation camps.<sup>254</sup> In a public comment on the Czollek debate the Israeli-born manager of the Anne Frank education centre in Frankfurt, Meron Mendel, referred to the USA and the arrangements suggested by the Reform Rabbi Conference in 1983.<sup>255</sup> These kinds of arguments and proposals for modification were mainly expressed in non-Jewish media. **JÜDISCHE ALLGEMEINE** intervened only twice.<sup>256</sup> In one editorial written by its president Joseph Schuster, the paper clarified the **ZENTRALRAT'S** Orthodox position on the matter. The central representative body passed the ball to the authority of the Orthodox Rabbi Conference, which had no intention of easing community membership or Jewish conversion for patrilineal Jews.<sup>257</sup> Eventually, the public exchange of views on the matter did not lead to a change of practice.

Nevertheless, looking at this most recent public debate among German Jews reveals several characteristics of contemporary Jewish life in Germany. First, it unveils the question of to what degree the concept of **EINHEITSGEMEINDE** can integrate liberal interpretations of Judaism into its ranks or whether non-Orthodox forms of Judaism will have to remain at the fringes of Jewish organisational life in Germany. Second, the debate shows the lack of inclusive Jewish media items allowing public intra-Jewish debate across the political and religious spectrum. This does not mean, thirdly, that there is no growing competition in Jewish representative work, which the **ZENTRALRAT** will have to cope with in the future. Alternative Jewish voices today – representatives of a young secular generation, of interests of the former immigrants from the Soviet Union or of patrilineal Jews – create their own visible Jewish spaces, even though thanks to non-Jewish platforms.

Last but not least, the ongoing reporting about patrilineal Jews in the German media in 2021 shows the German media scene's interest in Jewish issues and its willingness to inform German non-Jews about such topics. While a certain kind of exoticizing towards Jews by the non-Jewish public cannot be overlooked, the phenomenon must also be interpreted in the light of German spiritual reconciliation. The German media landscape is known for its educative character. Germany's responsibility to prevent antisemitism, and the idea of moral atonement through education, are firmly established values of media practice among liberal and centre-right media producers. This pattern within the whole media scene might be due to the cultural influence of the broad infrastructure of state funded television channels and radio stations, which less underly commercial considerations and are obliged to fulfil an educative mandate. The Berlin-Brandenburg radio station, for example, maintains a regular Friday afternoon program in which a rabbi interprets the weekly Torah reading, Parashat Hashavua.<sup>258</sup> This is just one example of the Germans' "interest and enthusiasm for 'things Jewish'", which "supersedes the power of their numbers", as Peck observed in 2006.<sup>259</sup>

<sup>254</sup> Ruth Zeifert and Yossi Dobrovych: "Sollen 'Vaterjuden' mit auf Machane?", *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 23 April, 2018, [www.juedische-allgemeine.de/religion/sollen-vaterjuden-mit-auf-machane/?q=vaterjuden](http://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/religion/sollen-vaterjuden-mit-auf-machane/?q=vaterjuden); Jonah Sievers: "Patrilinearität", *Allgemeine Rabbiner Konferenz* (n.d., after summer 2021), <http://a-r-k.de/kommentar/150/>.

<sup>255</sup> Veronika Wawatschek: "Debatte um 'Vaterjuden'. Wer ist offiziell Jude oder Jüdin?", *Bayrischer Rundfunk*, 19 October, 2021, [www.br.de/nachrichten/deutschland-welt/debatte-um-vaterjuden-wer-ist-offiziell-jude-oder-juedin,SmGsu8e](http://www.br.de/nachrichten/deutschland-welt/debatte-um-vaterjuden-wer-ist-offiziell-jude-oder-juedin,SmGsu8e).

<sup>256</sup> "Sehr kontrovers. Sechs Standpunkte zur Frage jüdischer Identität und Religionszugehörigkeit", *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 4 October, 2021, [www.juedische-allgemeine.de/politik/sehr-kontrovers/](http://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/politik/sehr-kontrovers/).

<sup>257</sup> Jens Rosbach: "Beitritt für Russischsprachige Zuwanderer. Konversion light?", *Deutschlandfunk Kultur*, 8 October, 2021, [www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/uebertritt-fuer-russischsprachige-zuwanderer-konversion-100.html](http://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/uebertritt-fuer-russischsprachige-zuwanderer-konversion-100.html); Wawatschek: "Debatte um 'Vaterjuden'".

<sup>258</sup> [www.rbb-online.de/rbbkultur/radio/programm/schema/sendungen/das\\_wort\\_zum\\_schabbat.html](http://www.rbb-online.de/rbbkultur/radio/programm/schema/sendungen/das_wort_zum_schabbat.html).

<sup>259</sup> Peck: being Jewish in the New Germany, p. 58f.

This high visibility of Jewishness in German mainstream media produced by non-Jews, or the dependence of Jewish artists and media producers on their non-Jewish consumers, leads to its own problems, such as the reproduction of old stereotypes and the creation of new clichés, the historicisation of Jews and their reduction to certain topics such as Israel, the Holocaust and victims of antisemitism. Israeli artists in Germany feel that they gain attention only because of their Jewishness.<sup>260</sup> According to the Russian-Jewish comedian Oliver Polak, the German entertainment industry made it clear to him that his Jewishness was his “unique selling point”.<sup>261</sup> According to Dani Kranz, the German media discourse on Jews “remains a key feature of ‘anormalizing’ Jews in Germany. It is not just a discourse of German non-Jews about Jews, but of Jews about Jews too. Paradoxically, by this token some Jews comply with the stereotypes of Jews as special and unique, and contributing something indispensable to Germany, thus still implicitly defending the fact that they live in Germany.”<sup>262</sup>

Younger forms of integrating Jewish topics into mainstream media are the late-night show *FRIDAY NIGHT JEWS* or Linda Rachel Sabier’s column *MY GERMAN JEWISH LIFE* (2019) in *SÜDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG*.<sup>263</sup> Although these innovative forms of Jewish media representation succeed in showing a diverse and up-to-date image of modern Jews in Germany, they remain within the discourse of Jews explaining themselves to an ignorant or potentially prejudiced non-Jewish audience. What might be missing is a modern show or media channel which comments from multiple Jewish perspectives on recent German events.

## OUTLOOK

The survey in hand has pointed towards several developments within the Jewish community in Germany which have their origins in the 1980s but have become increasingly important for the last 20 years. First and foremost, Jewish life in Germany, which is still dominated by the concept of *EINHEITSGEMEINDE*, has experienced a process of pluralisation. The influx of Russian-speaking and Israeli migrants in the 1990s and 2000s has diversified the community culturally, whereas movements such as *CHABAD*, the Progressive Movement and Masorti have established alternative offers for religious practice and even for institutional affiliation. The immigration of two new Jewries together with the *EINHEITSGEMEINDEN*’s delay in opening key positions to the Russian-speaking Jewish majority has, furthermore, led to the creation of alternative Jewish public spaces such as museums, art and theatre projects, student groups and magazines, or temporary discussions in the non-Jewish sector. Unlike the Jewish communities, these Jewish localities are welcoming or are even co-initiated by patrilineal Jews.

In the years to come, Jews in Germany will have to find ways to maintain this new Jewish landscape. One of the main challenges will lie in the aging character of the Jewish communities. Some see the solution for this problem in mobilising Jewish immigration to Germany, others in strengthening the Jewish affiliation of the many patrilineal Jews living in Germany and allowing them to join the institutions. This nexus of demographical and ritual considerations is accompanied by future obstacles of a different kind, such as the rising antisemitism, both online and in the analogue world, or the integration of young Jews or former immigrants from Russian-speaking countries into community management. All these points refer to finding innovative ways of communication and representation within the intra-Jewish sphere and in the wider German public as well as making Jewish community life attractive in an increasingly individualised world. It remains to be seen what the role of the Jewish refugees from Ukraine will be within the above-outlined future challenges.

<sup>260</sup> Kranz: “Das Körnchen Wahrheit im Mythos”, p. 6.

<sup>261</sup> Oliver Polak: *Gegen Judenhass*, Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2018, p. 81.

<sup>262</sup> Kranz: “Forget Israel”, p. 6.

<sup>263</sup> <https://sz-magazin.sueddeutsche.de/tag/mein-deutsch-juedisches-leben>.