

# Why be Jewish?

## The essential Jewish values and ideas of Europe's Jews

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## Introduction

This short paper draws on data gathered for the 2018 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) survey of Jewish perceptions and experiences of antisemitism.

Over 16,000 self-defined Jews participated in 12 EU countries, which, together, are home to about 80% of all Jews in Europe. Along with data about perceptions of antisemitism, the survey collected information on Jewish identity: how Jews define their Judaism, their essential Jewish values, the different modes of expression of their Jewishness, and the extent to which they participate in Jewish rituals and traditions.

Here we use some key findings to explore a central question: why be Jewish? Is it about believing in God, remembering the Holocaust, fighting antisemitism, supporting Israel, donating to charity, celebrating Jewish festivals with the family, or a combination of some or all of these? And critically, why does it matter?

## The main report

More detailed analysis can be found in the JPR report, *The Jewish identities of European Jews: What, why and how?* by Professor Sergio DellaPergola and Dr Daniel Staetsky.

## The key question: Why is Jewishness important to Jews?

The question of how better to address the needs, hopes and fears of minorities cannot be answered without fully understanding how ethnic and religious groups define the essentials of their identities.

Why is Jewishness important to Jews? The question relates to the motivations that underpin people's Jewishness, in the sense that certain essential aspects of Jewish thought, historical memory, interpersonal relations, community affiliation and participation in Jewish life resonate in the hearts and minds of different types of Jews. Examples include the importance attributed to the memory of the Holocaust, the desire or need to combat antisemitism, belief in God, social activism in or beyond the Jewish community, feeling part of the Jewish People, supporting the State of Israel, participating in Jewish festivals with family, and various other focal points of Jewish identification.

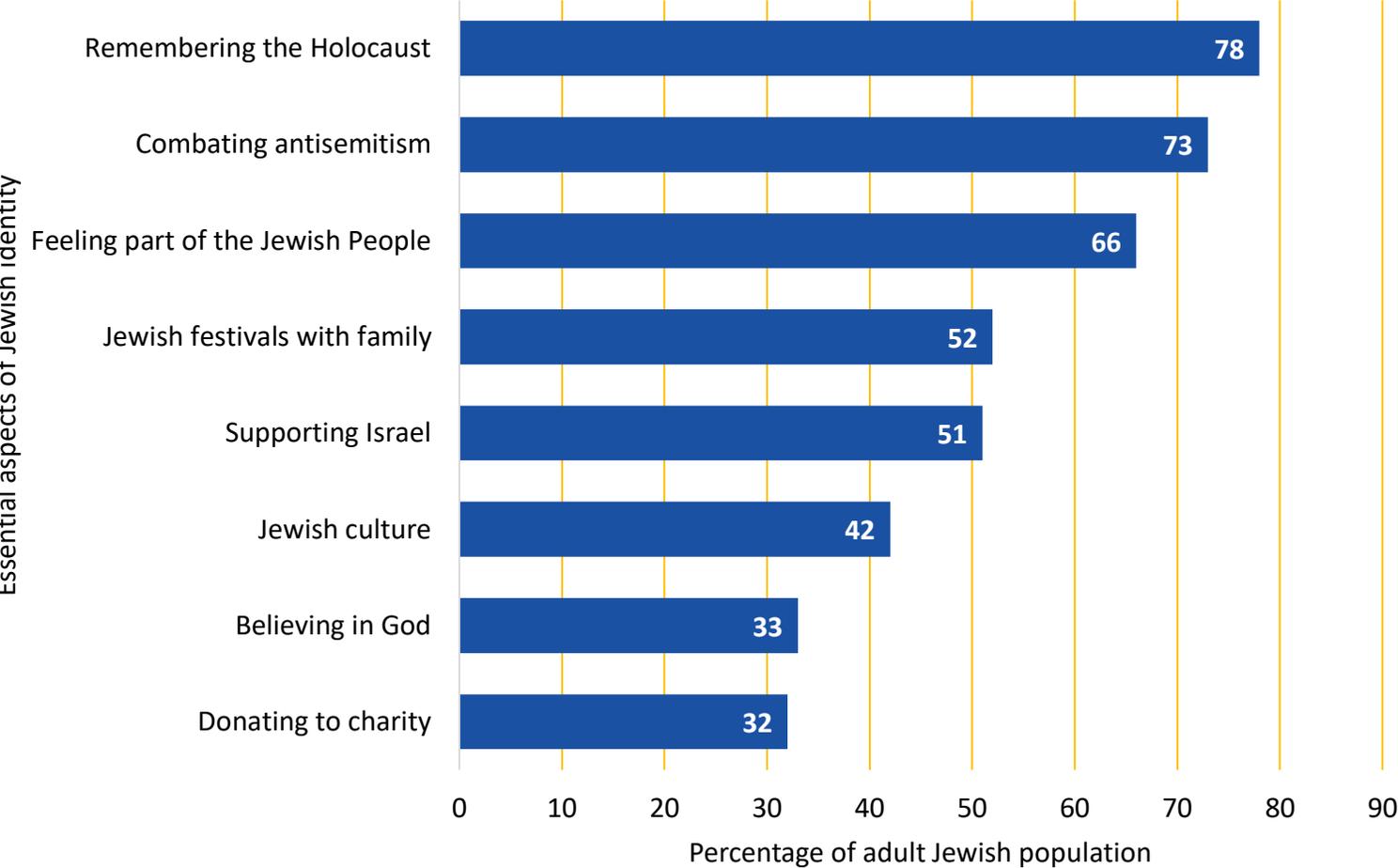
The importance people attach to these values and ideas can rarely be explained or quantified rationally but nonetheless, appear to be more or less salient, and sometimes very important in determining the individual's involvement with being Jewish.

## The policy issue

Why are people Jewish?  
What really matters to them?  
Is Jewish identity about God and faith? Israel? The family?  
Concern about antisemitism?  
Remembering traumas from the past? These are not purely internal or academic issues.

The ability to develop appropriate policies with regard to supporting all ethnic and religious minorities, including Jews, depends critically on understanding what matters most to them.

# Essential aspects of Jewish identity attract different levels of attention among European Jews



Note: Proportions shown represent those who said each item was 'very important' to their Jewish identity.

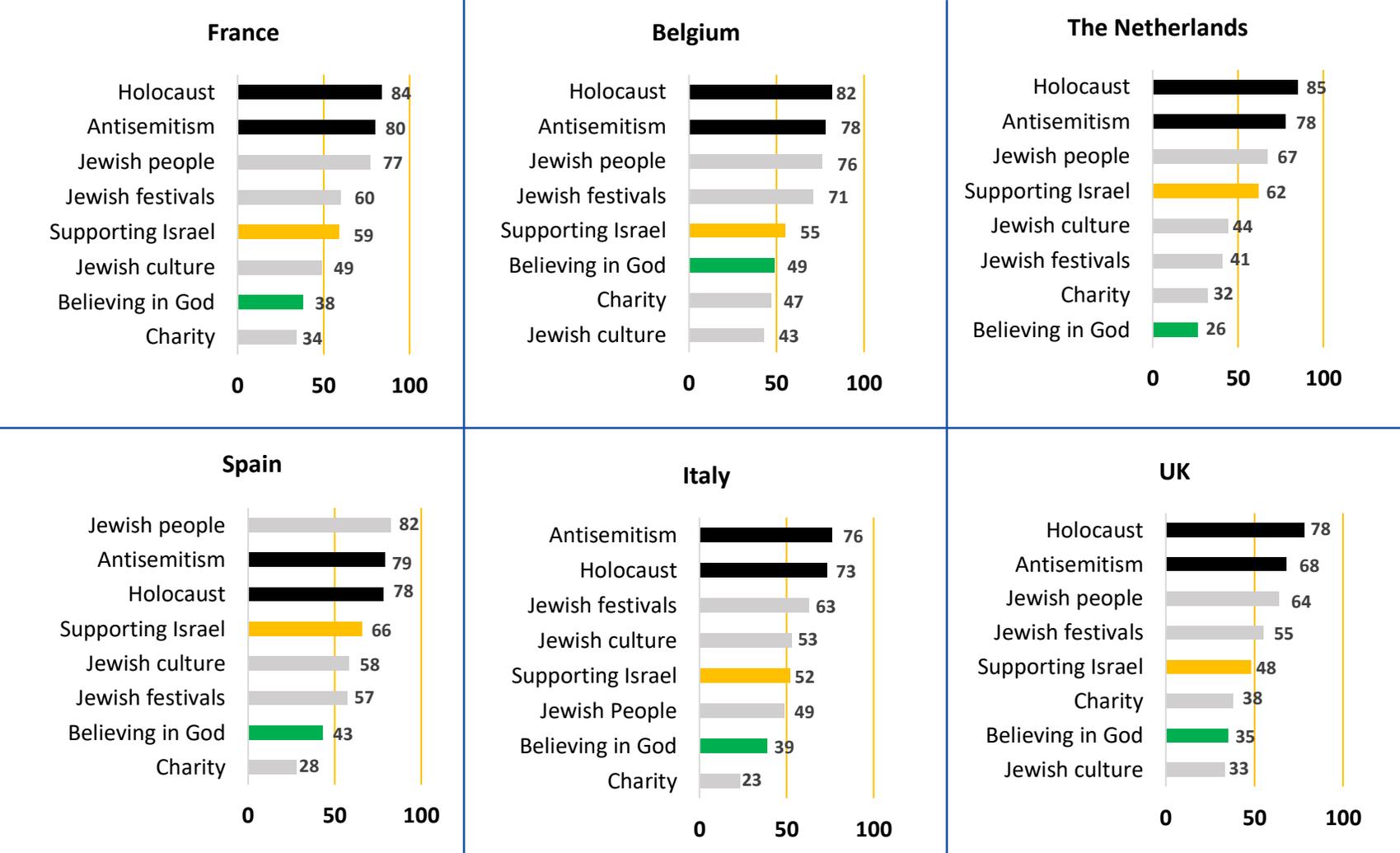
## Key insights

The percentage of Jews across Europe who said each aspect of Jewishness was 'very important' to their Jewish identity varies significantly. Memory of the Holocaust, the bitterest moment in modern Jewish history, leads, closely followed by combating antisemitism, as the two are powerfully linked. Feeling part of the Jewish People is third, followed by festivals with the family and supporting Israel. Religious belief is almost the least dominant aspect of those shown.

# How do Jews in different European countries prioritise the essential aspects of Jewish identity?

## Key insights

Remembering the Holocaust and combating antisemitism are the two aspects of Jewishness that resonate most strongly among Jews right across Europe. Feeling part of the Jewish People – a sense of solidarity with Jews worldwide – also features highly in most places, whereas believing in God commonly appears much lower down. Supporting Israel is always in the middle. Thus, the same basic hierarchy of Holocaust/antisemitism, then Israel, then religion, is found everywhere.

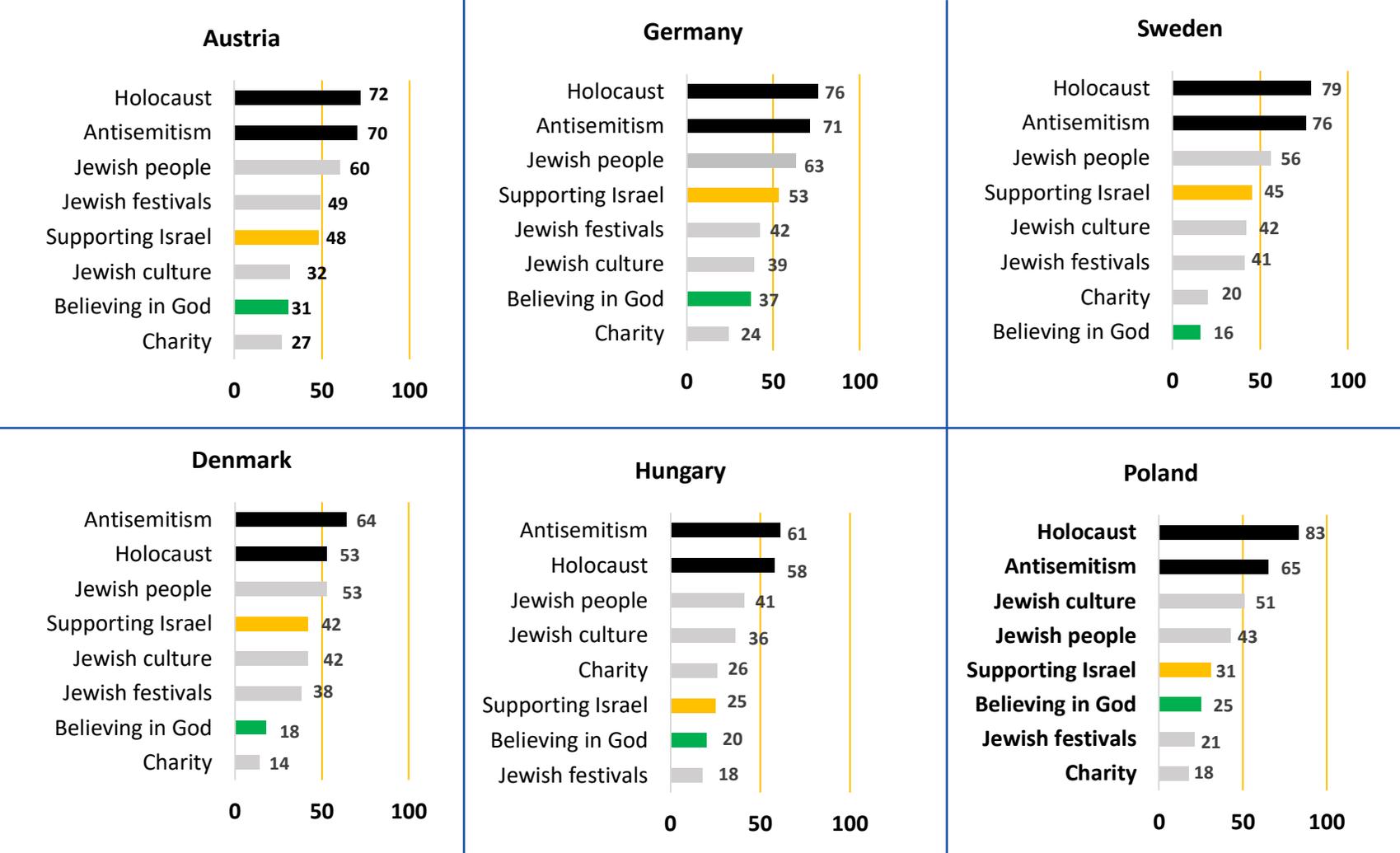


Proportions shown represent the percentage of the adult Jewish population who said each item was 'very important' to their Jewish identity.

# How do Jews in different European countries prioritise the essential aspects of Jewish identity?

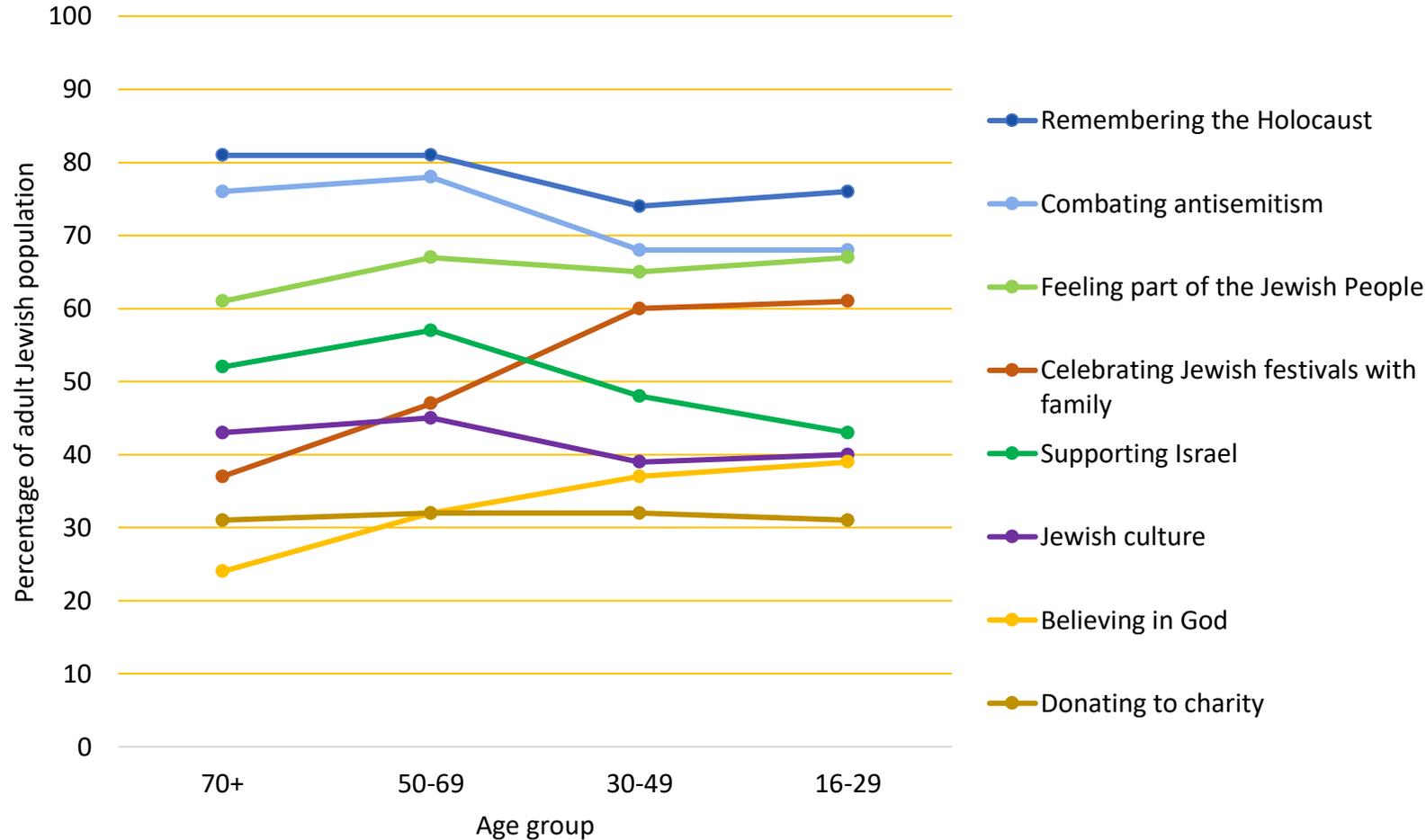
## Key insights

Among local peculiarities, the Holocaust and Antisemitism obtain the two top ranks except Spain. Jewish peoplehood ranks among the top three in all countries except Italy. Jewish culture ranks among the top four only in Poland, Hungary and Italy. Believing in God obtains one of the two bottom ranks everywhere except Belgium and Poland. The same applies to Giving to charity except Hungary and the UK. Supporting Israel ranks fourth/fifth everywhere besides Hungary.



Note: Proportions shown represent the percentage of the adult Jewish population who said each item was 'very important' to their Jewish identity.

## Remembering the Holocaust, combating antisemitism and Jewish peoplehood appear on top across all age groups

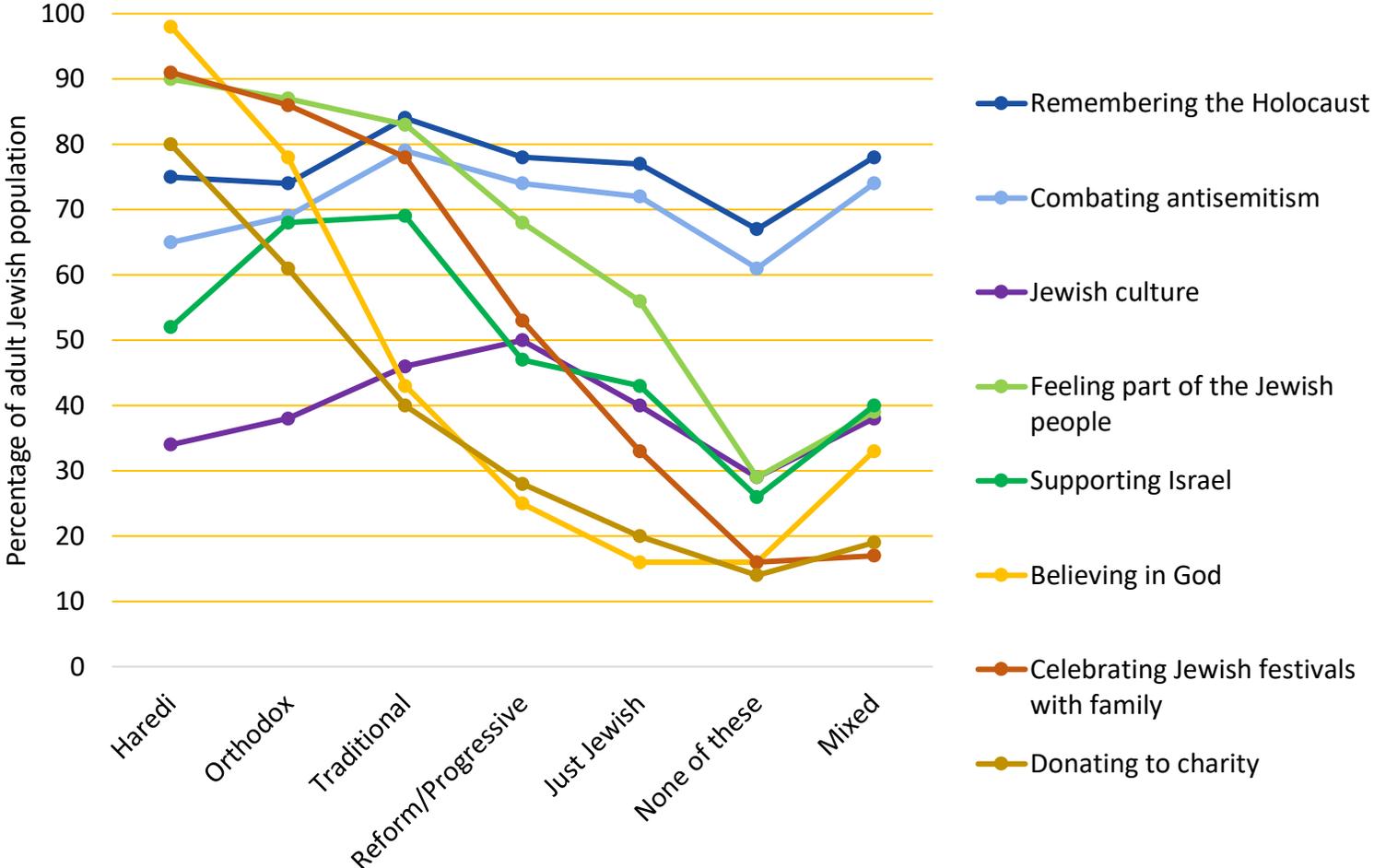


Note: Proportions shown represent the percentage of the adult Jewish population who said each item was 'very important' to their Jewish identity.

### Key insights

Younger Jews are more likely than older ones to regard Believing in God and celebrating Jewish festivals with family as particularly important to them. This may be due to demography: higher fertility among more Orthodox Jews results in a greater proportion of religiously-minded individuals among the younger generation than among older generations. The reverse is the case for supporting Israel – a clear decline in importance can be seen between 50-69 year-olds and those aged 16-29.

# Remembering the Holocaust and combating antisemitism are high across all denominations, unlike religious belief

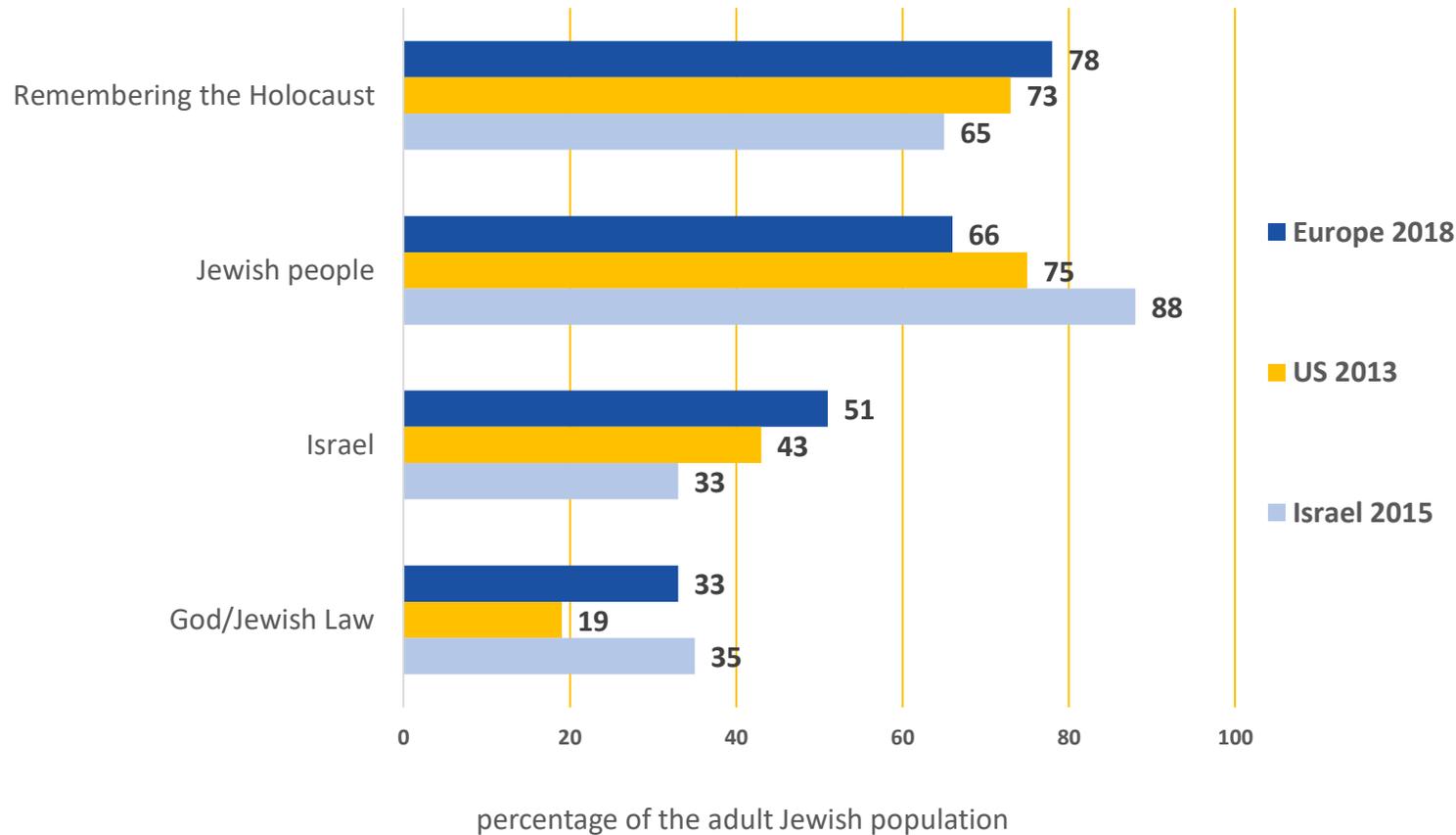


## Key insights

Religious belief, Jewish peoplehood, support for Israel, and charity are all more important to more religiously observant Jews than less religiously observant ones. By contrast, importance levels are rather stable across the denominational spectrum concerning Holocaust remembrance, combating antisemitism and, at a lower level, Jewish culture. One may expect more intra-Jewish disagreement in relation to the first set of issues than the second one.

Note: Proportions shown represent the percentage of the adult Jewish population who said each item was 'very important' to their Jewish identity.

## Jews in Europe, the US and Israel are rather similar with respect to the essential aspects of Jewish identity



Note: American and Israeli data come from Pew Research Center surveys of Jewish Americans (2013) and Israeli Jews (2015). The question on Israel in Europe relates to 'support' for Israel and in the US to 'care about Israel', whereas in Israel it is about 'living in Israel' so is not directly comparable. Religiosity is represented by 'Belief in God' in Europe and 'Observing Jewish law' in the US and Israel.

### Key insights

Survey data on Jews in the USA and Israel can be compared with FRA data on European Jews to explore similarities and differences between the communities. Jewish communities are similar to one another, barring slight distinctions between them in their prioritisations of the Holocaust and Jewish peoplehood. Israel stands out with a stronger feeling of Jewish peoplehood and a somewhat lesser emphasis on the Holocaust.

## What matters to European Jews?

Memory of the Holocaust, combating antisemitism and feeling part of the Jewish people are key priorities of European Jews when it comes to their Jewish identity. Religiosity ranks considerably lower, towards the bottom of the hierarchy. Support for Israel comes in between. In essentials, this picture is reproduced across different countries, age groups and religious denominations. It is also observed among American Jews, the largest Jewish Diaspora community. Among Israeli Jews, feeling part of the Jewish people resonates most strongly. Among American Jews, religion has the weakest resonance.

Some communities in Europe (e.g. the UK and Austria) have been undergoing desecularisation through demographic change: relatively high fertility rates among more religious Jews is causing their proportion in the total Jewish population to increase, a process which is expected to persist. In keeping with this development, the importance of religion can be expected to increase in the future. In contrast, given the similarity between generations and Jewish denominations with respect to the centrality of the Holocaust and combating antisemitism, the status of these aspects is not expected to change.

(continued...)

### Key insights

On some matters Jewish communities can be expected to speak with a high degree of consensus; on others, multiple voices are likely. Policy makers searching for an 'authentic Jewish voice' should take these realities into consideration.

A serious understanding of what matters most to Jews in the different European countries should accompany those who inform the public opinion or work to promote thought and evidence-based public policies.

## What matters to European Jews?

These findings provide a significant insight into Jewish sensitivities. The memory of the Holocaust is sacred to many Jews and has become part of their identity. It is not surprising to see that, according to the 2018 FRA survey, over 80% of Jews think that non-Jews who say that the Holocaust is a myth or has been exaggerated are definitely antisemitic. To think that Jews living in a country are not nationals of that country is considered definitely antisemitic by about 70% of respondents. Supporting a boycott of Israel or Israelis definitely sounds antisemitic to 44%. Minorities, including Jews, are at times accused of overreacting to criticism. The data show that Jews react in proportion to what matters to them.

Given the broad consensus among Jews regarding remembering the Holocaust and combating antisemitism, the Jewish community can reasonably speak with a strong degree of unanimity on these issues. This is not always so with respect to Israel and even less so with respect to religion. Support for Israel and, unsurprisingly, matters of faith, are important to more religious Jews and less so to the less religious; thus, more than one Jewish opinion will inevitably be expressed on these matters. On these issues, there may be a multiplicity of authentic Jewish voices. Furthermore, inside Jewish communities, disagreements are more likely to arise with respect to matters concerning religion and attitudes towards Israel than to antisemitism and the Holocaust.

### Key insights

The research findings contained within this report are designed to support policy makers. On some matters Jewish communities can be expected to speak with a high degree of consensus; on others, multiple voices are likely. Policy makers searching for an 'authentic Jewish voice' should take these realities into consideration.

## About the survey

The data in this report come from the 2018 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) survey on discrimination and hate crime against Jews in the EU. Fieldwork was conducted online by Ipsos and JPR in May and June 2018. The expertise in Jewish demography and social statistics necessary for the survey distribution was provided by JPR, as well as the data calibration, liaison and engagement work with Jewish communities, survey marketing work and advice on questionnaire development.

To be eligible to participate in the survey, respondents were required to self-identify as Jewish, and confirm that they were aged 16 or above, and lived in an EU Member State covered by the survey (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom). The online questionnaire was available in 13 languages. The final dataset contains 16,359 responses. The largest samples were obtained from the UK (4,728) and France (3,864), the two countries with the largest Jewish populations in Europe. Samples of over 1,000 respondents were obtained in Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden. Elsewhere, they were in the range of 400-800. The total sample contains about 2% of the total number of Jews in the countries covered by the survey – a very high proportion. In some countries (e.g. Poland and Denmark) about 9% of all Jews took part; in others (e.g. France, Hungary and Germany), about 1% did – still considered high by existing standards in the survey industry.

## Key facts

The data in this report come from the 2018 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) survey on discrimination and hate crime against Jews in the European Union, which was undertaken for FRA by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research and Ipsos.

The survey was the largest ever conducted among European Jews, and has played a key role in understanding and combating antisemitism in Europe.

## About the sample

The data were gathered by targeting the membership and subscriber lists of a carefully and broadly-selected cross section of Jewish organisations across Europe, and the subsequent referral of the survey by the first wave of respondents to their Jewish relatives, friends, acquaintances and colleagues. This generated a convenience sample, the representativeness of which was assessed by comparing the distributions of selected sociodemographic variables in the sample with external sources (e.g. census data, surveys and community statistics), including geography, gender, age and communal affiliation. After initial assessment and comparison with the benchmarks, weights were created and applied in order to redress the sample for over- or under-representation of certain subgroups among Jews.

## The question on which this paper is based

The data in this paper are based primarily on respondents' answers to the question: 'How important are the following items to your sense of Jewish identity?': (A) Believing in God; (B) Sharing Jewish festivals with my family; (C) Supporting Israel; (D) Jewish culture (such as Jewish music, literature and art); (E) Combating antisemitism; (F) Remembering the Holocaust; (G) Donating funds to charity; (H) Feeling part of the Jewish People.

## Key facts

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