



## Research report: Antisemitism in Romania

**BOND**

*Building tOlerance, uNderstanding and Dialogue across communities*



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## 2. Executive summary

This research report presents the findings of an extensive study conducted in Romania between March and September 2023, focusing on the multifaceted issue of antisemitism in the country. The study provides an analysis of the contemporary situation of Jewish communities in Romania, the prevalence and perceptions of antisemitism, and its intersection with other forms of intolerance. Additionally, the report examines efforts to prevent antisemitism through educational initiatives. The research reveals that antisemitism in Romania has deep historical roots, and it is still pervasive and widespread. It typically takes the form of latent stereotypes and prejudices, manifested in narratives

that are deeply intertwined with complex conspiracy theories and nationalist interpretations of Romanian history. Many individuals are unaware of the current-day expressions and manifestations of antisemitism, and this lack of awareness further exacerbates the problem. Although Romania has introduced legislation in recent years to combat antisemitism and other forms of discrimination and intolerance, the enforcement and implementation of these laws are inconsistent and sporadic. A positive development is the introduction of Holocaust education as a mandatory subject in high schools, starting in 2023. However, there are challenges in the effective implementation of this curriculum. Teachers call for clearer guidelines, training, and updated educational materials to ensure the new curriculum fulfils its goals.

The research underscores the pressing need for efforts to acknowledge and address antisemitism in Romania. These efforts should include increasing awareness about contemporary manifestations of antisemitism, consistent enforcement of existing legislation, and working collaboratively across sectors to strengthen Holocaust education initiatives. These steps are essential in combating the deeply entrenched antisemitism in the country and promoting a more inclusive and tolerant society for all.

### **3. Introduction**

The BOND (Building tOlerance, uNderstanding and Dialogue across communities) project<sup>1</sup> is being implemented between January 2023 and December 2024 in Hungary, Italy, Poland, and Romania. It aims to address the deep-rooted prejudices, hate attitudes and behaviours of society, particularly towards European Jewry. The project also aims to promote understanding, tolerance and dialogue. Special emphasis is put on raising young people's awareness of Judaism and antisemitism and on fostering intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. The research was carried out as one of the first steps of the BOND project. Both the project and the research use the definition of antisemitism adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA).<sup>2</sup> All phases of the research were completed until September 2023, so events after October 7, 2023, and their impact are not included.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bond-project.eu/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-antisemitism>

The research aimed to provide a comprehensive picture of antisemitism in Romania as a basis for further project activities. The research had limitations: it was conducted within the timeframe and scope defined in the project and along with topics relevant to the project's further activities.

## **Methodology**

The report is based on a combination of desk and field research using data from various sources. The desk research summarised available literature concerning Romania on the topics identified in the project from the past ten years. The results of the field research were compiled with findings from qualitative field research (eight interviews and four focus groups). The interviews included three experts, three practitioners (teachers and educators), and two community leaders (Roma and Hungarian minorities). The four focus groups (FGs) were conducted with the following stakeholders: FG1. first-line practitioners (teachers and educators); FG2: leaders of religious minorities; FG3: youth from majority and minority communities, and FG4: leaders and members of the Jewish communities. Thematic analysis, guided by the literature review, was used to structure and analyse the data from the field research.

## **Limitations**

The researchers encountered a major obstacle in identifying Jewish individuals willing to participate in the research. Through conversations with experts and representatives of the Jewish community, it became evident that there is a strong reluctance to be identified and conversing with outsiders about their experiences as Jews in Romania. Due to these challenges, the research phase was prolonged, and the Focus Group with members of the Jewish community was restructured into three separate interviews.

## **4. The situation of the Jewish communities in Romania**

Before WWII, Romania was the home of around 800,000 Jews<sup>3</sup>. Currently, the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) estimates a core Jewish population of about 8,700<sup>4</sup>, but the latest census

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<sup>3</sup> “Back to communities: Romania,” EJC European Jewish Congress, 2022, accessed 13 September 2023, <https://eurojewcong.org/communities/romania/>

<sup>4</sup> “Romania,” JPR Institute for Jewish Policy Research, accessed 10 July 2023, <https://www.jpr.org.uk/countries/how-many-jews-in-romania>

from 2021 reveals a much lower number: 2378<sup>5</sup>. According to the 2021 census, the majority of Romania's core Jewish population (906) reside in Bucharest. Smaller groups reside in Timis (144), Cluj (139), Bihor (135), and Iasi (133), and are spread across the country.<sup>6</sup> Most of the Jewish population are over the age of 70, and very few youth (under the age of twenty-five) currently live in Romania.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the Communist regime prohibiting all Zionist activity, organised Jewish life, including religion, culture and education, was active after WWII.<sup>8</sup> After 1989, the Jewish communal property was returned to the Federation of Jewish Communities. Remnants of ‘shtetl’ (Jewish village) life still remain present in some parts of Romania.<sup>9</sup> Synagogues and religious infrastructure are maintained, although less and less are operational. In Bucharest, three Synagogues<sup>10</sup> still hold weekly services. There are kosher cafeterias in some cities, and all Jewish children receive basic Jewish education<sup>11</sup>. Following the transition to democracy, a Jewish publishing house called *Hasefer* was established, and the *Center of Jewish History in Romania*, founded in 1976, gained legal status. In Bucharest, a department dedicated to Jewish studies was established. The Jewish community in Bucharest also operates an elderly retirement facility, a Jewish hospital, a clinic, and a pharmacy.<sup>12</sup>

The interviews confirmed that the Jewish community is small and inconspicuous compared to other minority groups (IR1). According to an interviewee, the Federation of Jewish Communities (JCC) in Romania reports 7,000 to 8,000 members, which is much higher than the 2021 census records (IR2). Some expatriates have returned from Israel but are not actively participating in the Jewish community (IR2). The lack of visible identification, such as wearing a *yarmulke*, makes it difficult for others to discern their Jewish background (FG4). The shrinking of the Jewish community is

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<sup>5</sup> ”Rezultate definitive: Caracteristici etno-culturale demografice”. *Populația după etnie la recensămintele din perioada 1930-2021 (Etnii, Județe)*. Recensământul populației și locuințelor 2021, accessed 1 December 2023: <https://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-rpl-2021/rezultate-definitive/>

<sup>6</sup> ”Rezultate definitive: Caracteristici etno-culturale demografice”. *Populația după etnie la recensămintele din perioada 1930-2021 (Etnii, Județe)*. Recensământul populației și locuințelor 2021, accessed 1 December 2023: <https://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-rpl-2021/rezultate-definitive/>

<sup>7</sup> “Back to communities: Romania,” EJC, 2022, accessed 13 September 2023, <https://eurojewcong.org/communities/romania/>

<sup>8</sup> “Back to communities: Romania,” EJC, 2022, accessed 10 July 2023, <https://eurojewcong.org/communities/romania/>

<sup>9</sup> “Back to communities: Romania,” EJC, 2022, accessed 10 July 2023, <https://eurojewcong.org/communities/romania/>

<sup>10</sup> The Yivo Encyclopedia for Jews in Eastern Europe: Bucharest. <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Bucharest>

<sup>11</sup> “Back to communities: Romania,” EJC, 2022, accessed 10 July 2023, <https://eurojewcong.org/communities/romania/>

<sup>12</sup> “Back to communities: Romania,” EJC, 2022, accessed 10 July 2023, <https://eurojewcong.org/communities/romania/>

accompanied by challenges related to assimilation and an ageing population (IR3). According to the interviews, Jewish community members are perceived as being well-integrated and well-adjusted, with high social status and respectable professions (IR1). There are religious Jews within the Jewish community, and despite the general perception of Jewish affluence, many lead humble lifestyles (IR3). Interview respondents confirmed that the Jewish community in Romania is ageing; many of the younger generation, particularly those who have returned from Israel, no longer identify themselves as part of the Jewish community (IR3). Efforts are made by organisations like the JCC to preserve traditions, language and other aspects of the Jewish heritage. There are still significant places of remembrance, such as graveyards and synagogues, although the latter often serve multiple functions unrelated to their original purpose (IR3). Many Romanians have had little or no interaction with Jewish people (IR6, FG3), contributing to the overall perception that there are very few Jews in Romania today (IR7).

## 5. Antisemitism in Romania

### Level and trend of antisemitism in society

The results of research by the Action and Protection League from 2021<sup>13</sup> found that Romania's combined proportion of latent and manifest antisemitism was above average (53%), and 16% of respondents in Romania answered that they "rather have negative feelings" about Jews. According to the same research, 28% of Romanians can be considered antisemitic in terms of primary antisemitism<sup>14</sup>, 63% in terms of secondary antisemitism<sup>15</sup>, and 49% in terms of new antisemitism<sup>16</sup>. Religious antisemitic beliefs were particularly high (second only to Greece in the same study of 16 European countries), with 30% agreeing with the statement: "Even now, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is an unforgivable sin of the Jews".<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, while the proportion of antisemites in Romania was high, the report also found a high proportion of Israel sympathisers (44%).<sup>18</sup> Like in most other post-

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<sup>13</sup> Kovács, András, Fischer, Gyorgy, "Antisemitic Prejudices in Europe: Survey in 16 European Countries". *Action and Protection League*. 2021, p. 33, accessed 3 November 2023, <https://archive.jpr.org.uk/object-2408>

<sup>14</sup> Primary antisemitism/traditional antisemitism includes three dimensions: 1) cognitive – the content of prejudicial statements, 2) affective – the emotions felt towards the object of prejudice, 3) conative – the willingness to act in accordance with prejudice, to accept discrimination.

<sup>15</sup> Secondary antisemitism is Holocaust relativisation, denial, and distortion.

<sup>16</sup> New antisemitism is anti-Jewish sentiments projected onto Israel as a focal point.

<sup>17</sup> Kovács and Fischer, "Antisemitic Prejudices in Europe". 2021, p. 27.

<sup>18</sup> Kovács and Fischer, "Antisemitic Prejudices in Europe". 2021, p. 68.

communist countries, when measuring both indicators for “philosemitism”, the report shows that support for Israel is much higher than support for Jews in Romania.<sup>19</sup>

Likely because of the small size of the Jewish population in Romania, antisemitism expresses itself mainly as historical revisionism, Holocaust denial and/or trivialisation, and global antisemitic conspiracy narratives.<sup>20</sup> It is mainly oriented around issues of memory and history – on a nationalist interpretation of Romanian history, especially the discussions of communism vs fascism, rather than immediate current events.<sup>21</sup> The lack of education about the Holocaust is illustrated by the fact that only 32% of respondents in Romania believed that the Holocaust happened in Romania, according to the results of research from 2021.<sup>22</sup> It mainly involves acts of vandalism, sabotage or harmful incidents, extremism in public institutions, trade-in fascist literature and objects, ceremonies and commemorations of militant neo-nazi groups, antisemitism and trivialisation of the Holocaust in the parliament, and antisemitism and Holocaust denial online.<sup>23</sup>

The field research indicated that most people are unaware or unable to identify manifestations of antisemitism. When asked directly, many respondents could not come up with examples of antisemitism; however, through conversations, they often present unconscious biases, prejudices or historical interpretations that place Jews in a negative light. Confirming what has been mentioned in the literature, antisemitism in Romania is expressed through history revisionism, nationalist rhetoric, failure to mention the Holocaust, or making it seem like what happened at that time was not Romania’s responsibility (FG3).

The COVID-19 pandemic had affected antisemitism in Romania: anti-restriction protests during the pandemic brought antisemitic rhetoric onto the streets.<sup>24</sup> In May 2020, a group of protesters put a protective mask on the statue of Elie Wiesel in Bucharest, explaining that “this personality transmitted a virus which is much more dangerous than the Wuhan virus [...]”.<sup>25</sup> The protesters were promoting a narrative presenting the fight against antisemitism and the ideas that accompany it as a

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<sup>19</sup> Kovács and Fischer, “Antisemitic Prejudices in Europe”. 2021, p. 68.

<sup>20</sup> Carstocea, “*Between Europeanisation and Local Legacies*,” p. 318.

<sup>21</sup> INSHR-EW and Studio12, “Perceptions of interethnic relations and the Holocaust in Romania”, p.12.

<sup>22</sup> Studio12, “Perceptions of interethnic relations and the Holocaust in Romania”, p.15.

<sup>23</sup> INSHR-EW, “Raport de Monitorizare: Mai 2022-Aprilie 2023”.

<sup>24</sup> INSHR-EW, “Raport de Monitorizare: Mai 2022-Aprilie 2023,” p. 51.

<sup>25</sup> INSHR-EW, “Raport de Monitorizare: Mai 2022-Aprilie 2023,” p.20.

virus more dangerous than COVID-19.<sup>26</sup> In March 2021, protesters continued promoting Holocaust-trivialising messages, comparing Romania with a Nazi camp and likening mandatory vaccinations to the medical experiments that were performed on victims of the Holocaust.<sup>27</sup>

In May 2021, the Romanian Government adopted the first National Strategy for the Prevention and Fight against Antisemitism, Xenophobia, Radicalization and Hate speech and appointed a special representative for the promotion of memorial policies and the fight against antisemitism and xenophobia.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, at the local level, there is poor understanding and a lack of awareness and responsibility, which hinders the practical implementation of the legislation.<sup>29</sup> Despite improved legislation, however, streets, statutes and other institutions are still named after known antisemitic war criminals.<sup>30</sup> The sporadic enforcement and lack of response from the authorities have emboldened a segment of society with extremist attitudes and behaviours.<sup>31</sup>

Expressions of antisemitism appear to be somewhat more prevalent among people who identify as politically conservative or right-wing.<sup>32,33</sup> A survey from 2021 found that 22% of Romanians believe that Jews act to destabilise the society.<sup>34</sup> The minority holding this view is over-represented by youth (18-29) without higher education, people who adhere to populist political views, who rarely, if ever, watch news on the TV, and who often comment on online articles (daily or several times per week).<sup>35</sup>

Gender does not appear to play a significant role in antisemitism in Romania. Research by ADL in 2014-2015 found that 47% of Romanians hold antisemitic attitudes, with a higher prevalence among

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<sup>26</sup> INSHR-EW, “Raport de Monitorizare: Mai 2022-Aprilie 2023,” p.20.

<sup>27</sup> INSHR-EW, “Raport de Monitorizare: Mai 2022-Aprilie 2023,” p.21.

<sup>28</sup> Guvernul Romaniei, “Fresh news: The Romanian government officially starts the implementation of the 2021-2023 National Strategy for preventing and combating anti-Semitism, xenophobia, radicalisation and hate speech, Press Release,” Tuesday 22 March 2022, accessed 7 August 2023, <https://gov.ro/en/news/the-romanian-government-officially-starts-the-implementation-of-the-2021-2023-national-strategy-for-preventing-and-combating-anti-semitism-xenophobia-radicalization-and-hate-speech>

<sup>29</sup> US Department of State, “2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Romania”, accessed 16 Sep 2023, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/romania/>

<sup>30</sup> INSHR-EW, “Monitoring Report: May 2020-April 2021”, p. 2-3.

<sup>31</sup> INSHR-EW, “Antisemitismul în vremuri de pandemie: RAPORT 2021-2022,” July 2022, accessed 16 August 2023, <https://www.inshr-ew.ro/en/monitorizarea-antisemitismului-in-romania-raport-2022/>

<sup>32</sup> INSHR-EW, “Antisemitismul în vremuri de pandemie: RAPORT 2021-2022,” July 2022, p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> INSHR-EW, “Monitoring Report: May 2020-April 2021, The Antisemitism in The Street,” 2021, p.22, accessed 7 August 2023, <https://www.inshr-ew.ro/en/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/EN-Raport-monitorizare-2021.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> Studio12, “Perceptions of interethnic relations and the Holocaust in Romania,” 2021, p.12.

<sup>35</sup> Studio12, “Perceptions of interethnic relations and the Holocaust in Romania,” 2021, p.12.



males (54%) compared to females (40%).<sup>36</sup> However, experts suggest that, while men might be more loud or visible in expressing antisemitism, gender is not a determining factor in antisemitic behaviour and attitudes (IR2). Rather, experts argue that antisemitic stereotypes and prejudices are pervasive in society, with no noticeable gender differences (IR2).

Practitioners (FG1) express concerns about young people's growing fascination with nationalist historical narratives, such as the Legionary Movement. Such content is circulating on social media (TikTok) and could lead to the adoption of corresponding ideologies, including antisemitism (FG1). Jewish respondents (FG4) and experts (IR5) argue that antisemitic stereotypes and prejudices are deeply ingrained in people's subconscious and not recognised as antisemitic by those who hold them. Some might even interpret certain stereotypes, like the notion that Jews are financially savvy, as compliments rather than harmful stereotypes (FG4).

### **Antisemitic stereotypes, prejudices, conspiracy theories**

ADL's report from 2015<sup>37</sup> identified that the most commonly held antisemitic stereotypes in Romania include "Jews talk too much about what happened to them during the Holocaust" (63%), "Jews have too much power in the business world... in international financial markets" (61% and 59%, respectively), and "Jews are more loyal to Israel than to the country in which they live" (58%)<sup>38</sup>. INSHR-EW's monitoring report (2021)<sup>39</sup> categorised the online manifestations of antisemitism into the following categories:

1. "Jews run the world or Romania" (increased from 70% to 73% in the sources monitored from 2020 to 2021),
2. "Judeo-Bolshevism", equating Jewishness with communism (decreased from 25% in 2020 to 11% in 2021),
3. Holocaust-denial or trivialisation/relativising,
4. Economic and religious antisemitism (to a lesser extent).

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<sup>36</sup> ADL, "ADL Global 100: Romania: 2014-2015," 2015, Accessed 7 August 2023, <https://global100.adl.org/country/romania/2014>

<sup>37</sup> ADL, "ADL Global 100: Romania: 2014-2015," 2015.

<sup>38</sup> ADL, "ADL Global 100: Romania: 2014-2015," 2015.

<sup>39</sup> INSHR-EW, "Monitoring Report: May 2020-April 2021, The Antisemitism in The Street," 2021, p.35.

Antisemitic discourse on social media is often context-driven and can, therefore, be difficult to identify by artificial intelligence or people not specifically trained for it.<sup>40</sup> Usually, links to news stories about the Israel-Palestine conflict or current events involving Jews are antisemitic because of how they are connected to a narrative that incites hatred.<sup>41</sup> Most commonly, these messages target the entire Jewish population (rather than particular individuals). About 65-70% of antisemitic messages on Facebook promote the narrative that “Jews rule the world or Romania”. Many other messages don’t fit the typical antisemitic rhetoric but are generally insulting, disapproving or resisting anything related to Judaism or the Jewish identity.<sup>42</sup>

The most prevalent stereotypes that emerged in the field research include Jews being affluent and possessing business acumen, Jews wielding significant power and influence, and Jews being highly intelligent and remarkably capable and productive. Members of the Jewish community in Romania report being perceived as exclusively prioritising their own community or being frugal and self-centred (FG4). The field research brought up occurrences of the use of the derogatory Romanian term "jidani", which has Slavic origins (IR1). Jews are often associated with power and negative symbols, such as George Soros being a symbol of evil and attributing societal problems to him (IR5). Others described passive antisemitism, where Jews are portrayed as culprits responsible for conspiracies and legends (IR2).

Conspiratorial antisemitism is also present in Romania. A majority of antisemitism on social media revolves around conspiracy theories<sup>43</sup>, most of which circulate the themes of Judeo-Bolshevism, Holocaust denial, and narratives about Jewish intervention in politics or the economy<sup>44</sup>. INSHR-EW’s report from 2021 showed a slight increase (3%) between 2020-2021 of antisemitic conspiracy-type content online, specifically on the topic of “Jews rule the world or Romania”<sup>45</sup>. In recent years, many of the articles published systematically use the war in Ukraine as a starting point to validate the antisemitic theories about how Jews rule the world.<sup>46</sup> Throughout 2021, there was a resurfacing of

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<sup>40</sup> INSHR-EW, “Monitoring Report: May 2020-April 2021, The Antisemitism in The Street,” 2021, p.35.

<sup>41</sup> INSHR-EW, “Monitoring Report: May 2020-April 2021, The Antisemitism in The Street,” 2021, p.35.

<sup>42</sup> INSHR-EW, “Monitoring Report: May 2020-April 2021, The Antisemitism in The Street,” 2021, p. 36-37

<sup>43</sup> US Department of State, “2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Romania”.

<sup>44</sup> INSHR-EW, “Raport de Monitorizare: Mai 2022-Aprilie 2023” p. 51

<sup>45</sup> INSHR-EW, “Monitoring Report: May 2020-April 2021,” p.28.

<sup>46</sup> INSHR-EW, “Monitoring Report: May 2020-April 2021,” p.28.

online content endorsing antisemitic ideologies and celebrating the Legionary Movement<sup>47</sup><sup>48</sup>. Presently, the discourse is intricately connected to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. In various conspiracy narratives, Jews are portrayed as individuals who profit from or have vested interests in the war<sup>49</sup>.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought up new conspiratorial antisemitic narratives. Much of the antisemitic content that was found online at the beginning of the pandemic in 2020 blamed Jews for the medical crisis. Some of the related messages developed and shared between 2020-2021 include: “Jews fund companies that produce the serum and encourage vaccination to gain control, as well as for economic gain; Jews encourage vaccination, but the serum administered to them and that given to non-Jews is different, the latter having harmful effects; Jews encourage discrimination and segregation of the ones who refuse vaccination”. 13% of the articles monitored in relation to the COVID-19 vaccines were linked to this topic, supporting the idea that the global systems are controlled by Jews.<sup>50</sup> There was a surge in popularity around the QAnon movement on social media, particularly on Facebook, throughout 2020. Due to interventions from Facebook, these groups are now much more difficult to find, and their audience is smaller than it was in 2020<sup>51</sup>.

### **Antisemitic hate speech and hate crime**

Hate speech continues to manifest in the online environment on websites, blogs, and social media. Topics on the public agenda (vaccination campaigns, studying the history of Jews and the Holocaust in schools, the outbreak of war in Ukraine) are used to promote antisemitic narratives.<sup>52</sup> Facebook remains the most popular social network, serving as a primary source of information and a major channel for public expression. In recent years, the platform’s improved mechanisms for removing content that violates the law or community standards have led to a migration of content to more permissive channels, such as Telegram or VK<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> INSHR-EW, “Monitoring Report: May 2020-April 2021,” p.36

<sup>48</sup> US Department of State, “2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Romania”, accessed 16 Sep 2023, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/romania/>

<sup>49</sup> INSHR-EW, “Raport de Monitorizare: Mai 2022-Aprilie 2023,” p. 45., <https://www.inshr-ew.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Raport-monitorizare-20-IULIE-2023.pdf>

<sup>50</sup> INSHR-EW, “Monitoring Report: May 2020-April 2021,” p.28.

<sup>51</sup> INSHR-EW, “Monitoring Report: May 2020-April 2021,” p.33.

<sup>52</sup> US Department of State, “2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Romania”.

<sup>53</sup> US Department of State, “2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Romania”.

The most common forms of hate speech witnessed by people in Romania are based on ethnicity (47%), followed by political orientation (40%), religion (33%), sexual orientation (31%), race (30%) and disabilities (30%)<sup>54</sup>. The incidents were most commonly witnessed on the street (53%), at work (24%), and among friends (19%).<sup>55</sup> 65% of respondents believe that hate speech has intensified in recent years.<sup>56</sup> Most antisemitic hate speech monitored online during the period 2020-2021 was collectively directed at Jews as a whole. Some individual targets appear recurrently (George Soros, Liviu Beris, etc.), but also newly falsely identified targets (Dominic Fritz), who are referred to precisely because they symbolise Jewishness.<sup>57</sup> The articles that were monitored for antisemitic content during 2020-2021 do not overtly incite hatred against Jews but could potentially be associated with a “call for resistance”. There is often the use of aggressive language and personal attacks.<sup>58</sup>

It appears that the high levels of antisemitic attitudes rarely translate to antisemitic violence. In Romania, as well as in other countries, there is essentially no relationship between the number of violent acts and the degree of anti-Jewish prejudice.<sup>59</sup> There was an increase in the reported number of antisemitic incidents in Romania between 2009 and 2019, from four incidents in 2009, peaking with 22 incidents in 2017 and dropping to 16 in 2019.<sup>60</sup> From 2020 to 2023, the rate of antisemitic content online also increased.<sup>61</sup> At important events or dates (e.g. the election campaign, Jewish holidays), antisemitism shows up more frequently online and in speeches from public representatives.<sup>62</sup> The rhetoric of antisemitic messages has remained fairly consistent in the media but appears at an increased pace.<sup>63</sup> Messages circulating the themes of Judeo-Bolshevism, Holocaust denial, and conspiracy narratives about Jewish intervention in politics or the economy are widespread. Recently, many articles

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<sup>54</sup> CNCD and IRES, “Sondaj de opinie 2018,” 2018, p. 28, accessed 13 September 2023, [https://www.cncd.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Sondaj\\_de\\_opinie\\_NoIntoHate\\_2018.pdf](https://www.cncd.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Sondaj_de_opinie_NoIntoHate_2018.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> CNCD and IRES, “Sondaj de opinie 2018,” 2018, p.30

<sup>56</sup> CNCD and IRES, “Sondaj de opinie 2018,” 2018, p.31

<sup>57</sup> INSHR-EW, “Monitoring Report: May 2020-April 2021,” p.31, <https://www.inshr-ew.ro/en/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/EN-Raport-monitorizare-2021.pdf>

<sup>58</sup> INSHR-EW, “Monitoring Report: May 2020-April 2021,” p.31.

<sup>59</sup> Kovács and Fischer, “Antisemitic Prejudices in Europe”. 2021, p. 81.

<sup>60</sup> Statista, “Number of incidents pertaining to antisemitism in Romania from 2009 to 2019,” 2023, accessed 17 September 2023, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1173749/romania-incidents-pertaining-to-antisemitism/>

<sup>61</sup> INSHR-EW, “Raport de Monitorizare: Mai 2022-Aprilie 2023”, 2023, accessed 4 August 2023, , <https://www.inshr-ew.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Raport-monitorizare-20-IULIE-2023.pdf>

<sup>62</sup> INSHR-EW, “Monitoring Report: May 2020-April 2021, 2021, p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> INSHR-EW, “Raport de Monitorizare: Mai 2022-Aprilie 2023”.

systematically use the war in Ukraine as a starting point to validate theories about how Jews rule the world.<sup>64</sup>

There have also been acts of hate crime, particularly in the form of vandalism, in recent years. On 12 September 2021, a memorial in the northern city of Bistrita was subjected to vandalism<sup>65</sup>, and at the beginning of 2023, there was an incident in a park in Deva, with Nazi symbols and slogans being left on the park's pathways.<sup>66</sup> In Iasi, newly installed panels remembering the events of the Iasi pogrom have been vandalised several times.<sup>67</sup> In March 2021, a social media statement by the Director of the Jewish State Theatre, Maia Morgenstern, about an encounter with antisemitic language was followed by death threats against her family and threats to set fire to the Jewish theatre.<sup>68</sup> The event instigated a criminal investigation and condemnation from the parliament, noting the rise of antisemitic incidents.<sup>69</sup>

Experts and practitioners interviewed expressed their own experiences of having been targets of hate speech due to their proximity to the topic. It was mentioned that people in Romania who work in the field of addressing these topics (Holocaust education, intercultural education, democracy and human rights) often become targets of hate speech and even death threats (IR5).

### **Antisemitism on the political level**

On the political level, antisemitism has been expressed mainly in the form of glorifying known antisemitic fascist leaders from the interwar period and war criminals from WWII, making them out to be patriots and Romanian heroes.<sup>70</sup> Political figures typically use antisemitic rhetoric to promote a nationalist, anti-communist historical narrative.<sup>71</sup> Expressions of economic or religious antisemitism are less commonly observed.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> INSHR-EW, "Raport de Monitorizare: Mai 2022-Aprilie 2023," p. 51.

<sup>65</sup> US Department of State, "2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Romania", accessed 16 Sep 2023, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/romania/>

<sup>66</sup> INSHR-EW, "Raport de Monitorizare: Mai 2022-Aprilie 2023," p. 6.

<sup>67</sup> INSHR-EW, "Raport de Monitorizare: Mai 2022-Aprilie 2023," p.7.

<sup>68</sup> US Department of State, "2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Romania".

<sup>69</sup> US Department of State, "2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Romania".

<sup>70</sup> INSHR-EW and Avangarde, "Responsabil de Holocaustul din România: Hitler Sau Antonescu," 2021, p.3.

<sup>71</sup> INSHR-EW and Avangarde, "Responsabil de Holocaustul din România: Hitler Sau Antonescu," 2021, p.3.

<sup>72</sup> INSHR-EW, "Monitoring Report: May 2020-April 2021," p.30.

Antisemitic remarks have been made by political leaders from the right-wing liberal party, National Liberal Party (PNL), and the far-right nationalist party, Alliance for the Unity of Romanians (AUR). Typically, the Judeo-Bolshevism narrative (associating Judaism with communism) is promoted as part of a right-wing nationalist narrative associating the Romanian national identity with anti-communism and aligning communism with Judaism, thereby painting Jews as “other” and not part of the Romanian national identity.<sup>73</sup> On 3 March 2021, Daniel Gheorghe, a parliamentarian from the PNL, delivered a speech in which he praised Mircea Vulcanescu, a convicted war criminal who endorsed antisemitic policies while serving under Antonescu’s WWII government.<sup>74</sup> A few days later, during a Senate session on 8 March 2021, Senator Lavric, a member of the AUR, spoke about Jewish involvement in initiating and promoting communism. Lavric's comments were made in response to criticism from Silviu Vexler, a Jewish member of parliament, who had raised concerns about the antisemitic nature of statements made by some parliament members, including Lavric. It's noteworthy that AUR shared Lavric's speech on its official Facebook page, making it part of a broader effort to shape the country's historical narrative.<sup>75</sup>

Increasingly, organisations that promote nationalist and extremist ideologies try to gain legitimacy by using public buildings as venues for their events.<sup>76</sup> For example, in October 2022, the "Reduta" Cultural Center, an institution under the Brasov City Council, partnered with the neo-Legionary Ogoranu Foundation to organise an event dedicated to Nicolae Purcărea, presenting him as an anti-communist fighter. Nicolae Purcărea was a member of the Legionary Movement who was arrested during the Antonescu regime and, after 1990, was among those who tried to re-establish the Legionary Movement through the “All for the Country” (Totul pentru Țară) party.<sup>77</sup> Similar incidents have occurred all across the country over the last year, lending legitimacy to organisations that glorify and attempt to rejuvenate the identity of the Legionary Movement.

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<sup>73</sup> INSHR-EW, “Raport de Monitorizare: Mai 2022-Aprilie 2023,” 2023, p. 14.

<sup>74</sup> US Department of State, “2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Romania”, accessed 16 Sep 2023, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/romania/>

<sup>75</sup> US Department of State, “2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Romania”.

<sup>76</sup> INSHR-EW, “Raport de Monitorizare: Mai 2022-Aprilie 2023,” 2023, p. 14.

<sup>77</sup> INSHR-EW, “Raport de Monitorizare: Mai 2022-Aprilie 2023,” 2023, p. 14.

## Antisemitism in the sporting sphere

INSHR-EW's most recent monitoring report highlights antisemitic incidents within the realm of sports in Romania during the period of May 2022-April 2023<sup>78</sup>. These incidents primarily occurred in football stadiums. In Cluj in October 2022, at the football match between CFR Cluj and Slavia Prague, some Cluj-Napoca supporters displayed, in the Czech language, signs with the antisemitic message: "You are just some Jews, Slavia". A few days later, the CFR supporters showed up at a meeting, showing a racist message targeting the Roma community.<sup>79</sup> In January 2023, the Sepsi Sfântu-Gheorghe-FC U Craiova football match was suspended due to xenophobic chants from the Craiova supporters. Similar chants have been used in recent years at several matches in which one of the teams is associated with the Hungarian community. At a football match in April 2023, the CSA Steaua team displayed a flag with the face of the leader of the Legionary Movement, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. At the Romania-Ukraine match on 24 June 2023, one of the messages in the stands praised the Legionary Movement.<sup>80</sup> These antisemitic and xenophobic incidents in recent years highlight the prevalence of hate speech, including antisemitism, in the sporting sphere.

## Perception of antisemitism in the Jewish community

According to surveys conducted by INSHR-EW in 2023, 71% of Jews in Romania agree that antisemitism exists in society today; only 6% consider that it does not exist at all.<sup>81</sup> 41% of Jewish respondents believe that antisemitism has increased over the last five years, while 38% think that it has remained the same.<sup>82</sup> The main expressions of antisemitism as perceived by the Jewish community is the desecration of cemeteries, with 68% reporting it as a very big or big problem, followed by antisemitism on social media (53%), vandalism of Jewish institutions and monuments (52%), antisemitism on the political arena (51%), in mass-media (42%), and on the street or in public places (38%).<sup>83</sup> 24% of Jewish respondents report having been the targets of antisemitic remarks, and 14%

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<sup>78</sup> INSHR-EW, "Raport de Monitorizare: Mai 2022-Aprilie 2023," p.11

<sup>79</sup> INSHR-EW, "Raport de Monitorizare: Mai 2022-Aprilie 2023," p.11

<sup>80</sup> INSHR-EW, "Raport de Monitorizare: Mai 2022-Aprilie 2023," p.12.

<sup>81</sup> INSHR-EW and Avangarde, "Raport de cercetare: Percepții ale minorității evreiești asupra societății Românești", 2023, p.3, accessed 4 Dec 2023, <https://www.inshr-ew.ro/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Raport-de-cercetare-minoritatea-evreiasca.pdf>

<sup>82</sup> INSHR-EW and Avangarde, "Raport de cercetare: Percepții ale minorității evreiești asupra societății Românești"2023, p. 4

<sup>83</sup> INSHR-EW and Avangarde, "Raport de cercetare: Percepții ale minorității evreiești asupra societății Românești"2023, p. 5.

had been targets of antisemitic actions in the last five years.<sup>84</sup> 27% of respondents report that they often or sometimes avoid wearing objects that could identify them as Jewish when they are in public, and 21% avoid posting content online that might reveal their Jewish identity.<sup>85</sup>

Jewish focus group respondents supported the findings, which indicate widespread and pervasive antisemitism in Romania (FG4). Experiences include overt opposition to interfaith marriage, negative vocabulary about Jewish people, reluctance to self-identify as Jewish due to fear of bias and prejudices, Holocaust denial, and more covert stereotypes that are expressed in trivial conversations and behaviour (FG4). One respondent gave the example of a situation where they had disclosed their Jewish heritage to an elderly Hungarian lady, who had responded with “flattering” comments about Jews being “smart” and “tricky”, not realising that her words were reflecting common and harmful stereotypes about Jewish people (FG4). Jewish respondents (FG4) also claimed to have noticed an increase in violent acts of antisemitism in recent years, some attributing it to a surge in nationalism and growing divisions between various groups within society. It was suggested that antisemitic sentiments have been exacerbated by the prevailing divisive and nationalist ideologies (FG4).

Jewish respondents characterised the belief that there is no antisemitism in Romania as “ideal thinking,” arising from innocence, ignorance, or a lack of awareness about what constitutes antisemitism. Some people may hold antisemitic beliefs without realising it, as these beliefs have been passed down through generations as “normal.” (FG4).

## **6. Enmity against other minority groups in the country**

Besides the Jewish community, the minority groups that are most affected by group-focused hatred are the Roma, the LGBTQ+, and the Hungarian minority<sup>86</sup>. The main forms of expression of enmity against these groups, particularly the Roma, include discrimination, hate speech and prejudices. A survey from 2021 found that a majority of people are neutral in their attitudes towards ethnic minorities, the strongest negative perception being towards the Roma, a group which is considered a

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<sup>84</sup>INSHR-EW and Avangarde, “Raport de cercetare: Percepții ale minorității evreiești asupra societății Românești”, 2023, p. 7-14

<sup>85</sup>INSHR-EW and Avangarde, “Raport de cercetare: Percepții ale minorității evreiești asupra societății Românești”, 2023, p. 18-19

<sup>86</sup> Studio12, “Perceptions of interethnic relations and the Holocaust in Romania,” 2021, p.12.



problem by a staggering 38% of the population.<sup>87</sup> Opinion polls from 2018<sup>88</sup> showed that the most distrusted groups in Romania are the Roma (72%), followed by religious minority groups (56%), and the Hungarian (53%) and Jewish (46%) minorities. The only group more distrusted than Roma are people who identify as homosexuals (74%), followed by immigrants (69%) and Muslims (68%). Although discrimination based on sexual orientation is prohibited under Romanian law, discrimination against LGBTQ+ is common. A 2020 survey by the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency found that 15% of LGBTQ+ individuals had suffered physical or sexual attacks linked to their sexual orientation or gender identity in the past five years; only 4% reported them to authorities due to fear of discrimination.<sup>89</sup> Hate speech targeting any kind of minority, especially sexual and ethnic, is typically combined with Euroscepticism and anti-globalism.<sup>90</sup>

The field research indicated widespread agreement about the Roma being the main target of group-focused hatred and discrimination in Romania. The expert interviews (IR2) highlighted that anti-Roma and anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments are both more prevalent and dangerous than antisemitism in their manifestations. A Jewish respondent (from FG4) pointed out that the groups most affected are the ones you can most clearly identify as “different” from the majority group, those who are easily identifiable by their look as “different”. In line with this, Hungarian (IR8) and Roma (IR1, IR4, IR7, FG3) respondents also emphasised that they attempt to hide their ethnic identity, citing fear of discrimination, hatred or loss of opportunity.

The field research found that Roma are commonly displayed as thieves, dirty, dangerous, and stupid (FG3). Jewish respondents (FG4) grew up hearing the use of derogatory language when mentioning the Roma (“gypsies”), ingraining in them from a young age the assumption that Roma are dangerous because they are different. The Roma youth (FG3) shared stories that exemplify discrimination, where their ethnicity led to unjust treatment. For example, a teacher refused to give a passing grade to a competent Roma student despite good results overall, preventing them from graduating high school (FG3). Another illustrative example was when an administrator made prejudiced assumptions about a Roma student, which led to them being denied access to a course. The assumption was that the young girl had children, which was not the case. Roma youth believe that the

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<sup>87</sup> Studio12, “Perceptions of interethnic relations and the Holocaust in Romania,” 2021, p.3-6.

<sup>88</sup> CNCD and IRES, “Sondaj de opinie 2018,” p. 12.

<sup>89</sup> US Department of State, “2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Romania”, accessed 16 Sep 2023, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/romania/>

<sup>90</sup> INSHR-EW, “Monitoring Report: May 2020-April 2021,” p.26.

corrective measures introduced by the Romanian state, such as special spots in schools, exacerbate divisions and tensions, further isolating and marginalising Roma youth (FG3). A Romanian youth mentioned an incident where a Roma individual was unjustly pulled off a bus. The respondent perceived it as an act of ethnic hatred and emphasised the unfairness in treatment based on ethnicity (FG3). A Roma community leader pointed to intersections with gender, highlighting that gender-based violence is a pervasive cross-cutting issue (IR4). These stories underscore the pervasive discrimination and hatred that the Roma face, both openly and through institutional biases. The stereotypes about the Hungarian minority typically focus on nationalist ideas, fears and questions about “why they are still here” (FG1). Jewish and Hungarian minorities have sometimes been perceived as intellectual threats or as having more societal power in Romania, whereas the Roma minority have a lower status and fewer rights (IR7).

## 7. Antisemitism prevention in education

### Jewry, antisemitism and the Holocaust in the official educational curricula

Until recently, the teaching of the Holocaust in schools has been optional and often lacking.<sup>91</sup> In 2021, the Romanian government passed legislation making Holocaust education, "History of Jews and the Holocaust in Romania" mandatory in schools.<sup>92</sup> In the updated curriculum from 2021, 9th-grade history students learn about the history of the Jews, among other groups.<sup>93</sup> From 2022, 10th-grade history students learn about political regimes in the interwar period and interwar international relations, including the Holocaust and Romania in the two world wars.<sup>94</sup> 10th-grade students in religion also learn about Judaism, Jewish culture and the Old Testament.<sup>95</sup> From 2023, 11th-grade history

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<sup>91</sup> INSHR-EW, “Monitoring Report: May 2020-April 2021”, p. 2-3.

<sup>92</sup> INSHR-EW, “Antisemitismul în vremuri de pandemie,” 2022.

<sup>93</sup> Ministerul Educației, “REPERE METODOLOGICE PENTRU APLICAREA CURRICULUMULUI la CLASA A IX-A în anul școlar 2021-2022 LIMBA ȘI LITERATURA ROMÂNĂ, învățământ liceal și profesional,” 2021, *Centrul Național De Politici Și Evaluare În Educație*, accessed 15 September 2023, <https://edu.ro/>

<sup>94</sup> Ministerul Educației, “REPERE METODOLOGICE PENTRU APLICAREA CURRICULUMULUI LA CLASA a X-a ÎN ANUL ȘCOLAR 2022-2023, Disciplina ISTORIE,” 2022, *Centrul Național De Politici Și Evaluare În Educație*, accessed 15 September 2023, <https://edu.ro/>

<sup>95</sup> Ministerul Educației, “REPERE METODOLOGICE PENTRU APLICAREA CURRICULUMULUI LA CLASA a X-a ÎN ANUL ȘCOLAR 2022-2023, Disciplina RELIGIE,” 2022, *Centrul Național De Politici Și Evaluare În Educație*, accessed 15 September 2023, <https://edu.ro/>

students learn about political ideas and regimes<sup>96</sup>; 11th-grade students of religion might study Judaism<sup>97</sup>, and the general term “discrimination” will be covered in the subject Sociology and Economy<sup>98</sup>. However, no clear guidelines regarding discussions on antisemitism are included in the curriculum.

Teachers often use lessons from Holocaust education and antisemitism to address other contemporary issues related to discrimination, xenophobia, and chauvinism (FG1). For example, while mandatory Holocaust education now exists for high school students, there's no equivalent for Roma history.

The first-line practitioners (FG1) reported that there is a divide among teachers, some considering the study of the Holocaust unnecessary and receiving too much attention. While respondents think that Holocaust education is improving, concerns are raised about the quality of textbooks and other educational materials on Jewish history and antisemitism. Some teachers are concerned about the violent imagery often used in classroom presentations, leading to a negative association between Jews and death, sadness, and victimhood (IR3). Teachers have a wide range of materials available to them for educating students about the Holocaust; however, there is a need for more and improved materials focusing on the historical local situation in Romania and connecting it to antisemitism and other current manifestations of intolerance (IR3). Teachers believe these materials should be better adapted to suit the needs of youth and argue that they should have been piloted before being introduced in classes (FG1).

### **Educational materials and activities addressing antisemitism**

The materials and activities provided in the official curriculum focus primarily on the Holocaust in historical terms, specifically the Holocaust, as it happened in other European countries (not in Romania). The resources primarily consist of documentaries, with learning mainly through storytelling and testimonies of survivors, but also on analysis of the movements in society which led

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<sup>96</sup> Ministerul Educației, “REPERE METODOLOGICE PENTRU APLICAREA CURRICULUMULUI LA CLASA a XI-a ÎN ANUL ȘCOLAR 2023-2024, *Disciplina ISTORIE*,” 2023, *Centrul Național De Politici Și Evaluare În Educație*, accessed 15 September 2023, <https://edu.ro/>

<sup>97</sup> Ministerul Educației, “REPERE METODOLOGICE PENTRU APLICAREA CURRICULUMULUI LA CLASA a XI-a ÎN ANUL ȘCOLAR 2023-2024, *Disciplina RELIGIE*,” 2023, *Centrul Național De Politici Și Evaluare În Educație*, accessed 15 September 2023, <https://edu.ro/>

<sup>98</sup> Ministerul Educației, “REPERE METODOLOGICE PENTRU APLICAREA CURRICULUMULUI LA CLASA a XI-a ÎN ANUL ȘCOLAR 2023-2024, *Disciplina SOCIO-UMANE*,” 2023, *Centrul Național De Politici Și Evaluare În Educație*, accessed 15 September 2023, <https://edu.ro/>

to the rise of the Nazi regime and the Holocaust. In the updated 10th-grade history curriculum, there are links to TedEd resources, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum<sup>99</sup>, and the online Anne Frank House Museum<sup>100</sup>. These materials and activities are easily available to teachers. However, most of them are in English, and language barriers might hinder many teachers from using and/or understanding the content.

Teachers often seek supplementary materials beyond the official curriculum to enhance learning experiences. For instance, INSHR-EW developed region-specific notebooks in Romania focusing on the Holocaust to help teachers connect historical events with local geography and adapted victim memoirs (IR2). While approved by the Ministry of Education, its utility in classrooms remains uncertain (IR2). Additionally, INSHR-EW introduced an outdoor comic book exhibition in 2023 to commemorate local Holocaust victims (IR1). Other resources include videos by the National Roma Culture Center, online information about the Roma community (IR7), interactive lessons at the Synagogue History Museum in Oradea, and initiatives by dedicated teachers to organise projects, activities, and excursions related to Holocaust education. However, concerns were raised that making Holocaust history mandatory without proper teacher training may compromise the quality of education on this subject (FG1). Despite the availability of numerous NGO-developed resources, teachers frequently lack awareness of their freedom to incorporate these materials to meet curriculum demands (IR5). Many teachers mistakenly believe they are restricted to official school textbooks, leading valuable resources to be underutilised in extracurricular activities despite their perfect alignment with the curriculum. While some educators grasp the potential and are open to using these resources to fulfil curriculum needs, resistance often arises from middle management roles within educational hierarchies (IR5).

### **Needs of FLPs in addressing antisemitism through education**

The field research highlighted several needs of FLPs in addressing antisemitism through education. Respondents highlighted the importance of connecting students with the history of the local community, offering glimpses into the surroundings and lifestyle of the Jewish community before the Holocaust (IR3). Experts emphasised the importance of using positive images and respecting the rights of victims when using pictures in pedagogical settings (IR3). Experts and first-line practitioners argued

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<sup>99</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Online lectures: Studying Primary Sources from the Holocaust," accessed 13 September 2023, <https://www.ushmm.org/information/exhibitions/online>

<sup>100</sup> Anne Frank House, "The Anne Frank House online," accessed 13 September 2023, <https://www.annefrank.org/en/museum/web-and-digital/>

that many schools are not doing enough to tackle discrimination, hatred, and intolerance. Resistance or systemic barriers often hinder good efforts (IR1, IR5). For this reason, there is a need to adopt a whole-school approach, targeting not only teachers and students but also involving parents and other stakeholders (IR5). Teachers and educators (FG1) argued that there is a need for updated materials, textbooks and manuals that are pilot-tested, relevant and resonate with youth today (FG1). There is a need for resources that help deconstruct narratives and combat internalised prejudices (FG1). Extracurricular activities and collaborations with NGOs are valuable in creating spaces for addressing these issues outside the constraints of traditional school settings (IR5 & IR6).

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