

## Report on Antisemitism for the German, Italian and Romansh language areas of Switzerland

# A new subculture prone to conspiracy theories is generating an increasing number of antisemitic incidents

The number of registered antisemitic incidents rose again in 2022, both online and in the real world. Reasons behind the online increase are to be found mainly in a new subculture that is hostile to society and state institutions.

A subculture with an affinity to conspiracy theories has formed in Switzerland since the beginning of the corona pandemic three years ago, and is responsible for a majority of the online antisemitic incidents. Surveys conducted for the Report on Antisemitism by the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities SIG and the GRA Foundation against Racism and Antisemitism show that this subculture, with its Telegram groups, is currently the source of around 75 percent of all online incidents. It is therefore the main factor behind the increase in antisemitic incidents registered in 2022 in the German, Italian and Romansh language areas of Switzerland.

## Numbers and categories for 2022

The number of registered antisemitic incidents in the real world, excluding the online sphere, rose again in comparison to the year before, from 53 to 57. For the first time since 2018, a physical assault (+1) was reported to the SIG. Incidents of verbal abuse (16) remained at the same level as 2021. Public antisemitic comments (6, -1), offensive graffiti (9, +2) and sent items (26, +3) recorded only slight changes. There was one public antisemitic act (-2) and one antisemitic poster (+1). No damage to property was registered in 2022.

Online, the number of antisemitic incidents continued to rise, with 853 registered incidents (2021: 806) representing a roughly 6 percent increase. The increase was, however, less steep than in 2021 (+66 percent). Overall, taking the real-world and online categories together, there were 910 reported incidents (2021: 859). A partly new development can be seen in the triggers that, directly or indirectly, led to antisemitic incidents in the year under review, with the main ones identified as “Corona” and “War in Ukraine”. As a rule, the incidents resulting from these triggers can be categorised under “General antisemitism” and

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“Antisemitic conspiracy theories”. The share of contemporary antisemitic conspiracy theories among the online incidents of 2022 rose from 51 to 57 percent. This fact can be clearly attributed to the above-mentioned subculture, with Telegram as its preferred channel of communication.

## Antisemitism spread by a subculture hostile to society and state institutions

This subculture that sees society and state institutions as the enemy and is prone to conspiracy theories has formed in Switzerland and other countries since the beginning of the corona pandemic. The 75 percent share of online incidents accounted for by this subculture and its Telegram groups represent a massive increase compared to the 61 percent of previous year (2022: 640 incidents, 2021: 445). One reason for this increase is the lack of control and sanctioning by the platform operators, a fact that had already been criticised in the past years. Another is the non-stop and high level of activity in this scene.

Numerous conspiracy theories are generated in this environment, often related to the corona pandemic as well as other topical issues. A new element in this field is the war in Ukraine. In the minds of conspiracy theory adherents, all these topics and the associated theories are connected and blend to a single reality. This subculture thereby creates a parallel world of its own, which causes an increasing number of people in the scene to distance themselves from society in general and from the state with its current structures. It may realistically be assumed that there is – judging by circulated threats and fantasies of violence – a latent potential for violence coming from this group. The Federal Intelligence Service itself has issued warnings regarding possible radicalisation of such groups or of individuals.

## Overall situation in Switzerland

The situation in Switzerland’s French language region is assessed by the Coordination Intercommunautaire contre l’Antisémitisme et la Diffamation CICAD in a report of its own. A joint synthesis summarises the most important trends. In 2022, CICAD registered 562 incidents in French-speaking Switzerland (2021: 165). The strong increase is, however, mostly due to the expansion of CICAD’s monitoring to include further online platforms. As elsewhere, the number of real-world incidents in the French language region was up slightly (2022: 28, 2021: 22). What stands out here is the desecration of a synagogue. As in the other parts of the country, the triggers «Corona» and «war in Ukraine» were behind a large number of online cases, while the presidential elections in France provided a further trigger in the French-speaking parts. In 2022,

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antisemitic conspiracy theories were often linked to corona (as in the years before) and the war in Ukraine (new factor). As a result, the share of online incidents connected with conspiracy theories rose in the whole of Switzerland. The stagnation in the number of Israel-linked cases of antisemitism was also observable in French-speaking Switzerland, whereas a steep increase was recorded there in the Shoah denial category.

## SIG and GRA demand stronger state commitment and action

The insights resulting from this Report underscore the importance of antisemitism monitoring. The Swiss Confederation is called upon to grant greater support to observation and analysis instruments run by NGOs and associations and to finally assume co-responsibility. It should, moreover, examine possible legal means of registering and limiting hate speech. Politicians are also called upon to assert their influence on social media platforms, and on Telegram in particular, requiring them to prevent the spread of hate messages. Overall, a national strategy against antisemitism is needed, with specific instruments for analysis, prevention and sanctioning. This includes the prohibition of Nazi symbols currently under debate in Parliament, which needs to be implemented as swiftly as possible.

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