

## What can you do to combat antisemitism?

The District of Viersen is part of the federal state of North-Rhine Westphalia, which is home to the largest Jewish community in Germany. The state sees the fight against antisemitism as the basis for peaceful co-existence.

In the Third Reich, Jewish communities in Viersen were destroyed, and Jews were murdered.

Today Jewish life carries on in synagogues in Germany, which must be protected as Jews are still sometimes the target of attacks.

Even though there is no longer a Jewish community as such, Jews are a natural part of Viersen.

The District of Viersen is committed to fighting antisemitism, provides information about Jewish life and combats prejudice against Jews so that intercultural co-existence can function and everyone can feel a part of it.

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# ANTISEMITISM

What does it actually mean?

## What is antisemitism?

In order to take action against antisemitism, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) has drawn up an international working definition of antisemitism. This has been ratified by both the Federal Republic of Germany and the federal state of North-Rhine Westphalia and should be used as a tool to distinguish expressions of opinion from antisemitism.

The definition is as follows:

“Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”

This definition has also been expanded by the federal government:

“In addition, the state of Israel, which is understood in this context as a Jewish collective, may be the target of such attacks.”

In order to ensure a consistent approach in the battle against antisemitism, the Coordination Office for the Prevention of Extremism (Koordinierungsstelle Extremismusprävention (KoEx)) of the District of Viersen also works with this internationally recognised definition.

## Forms of antisemitism

### Traditional antisemitism

In traditional antisemitism, the assumption is that Jewish people are different from the rest of society. Jewish people supposedly have power, and they abuse it. They harm other people in doing so. Antisemitism is, therefore, also presented as a form of defence. A reversal of the perpetrator-victim relationship takes place to justify rejection, hostility and the desire to annihilate Jews.

### Israel-related antisemitism

In the case of antisemitism related to Israel, Israel is attacked on the basis of assumptions that are not rooted in fact. Some aspects are similar to the traditional forms of antisemitism: Israel is not criticised for what it is, but for what Israel is believed to be – and what is believed culminates in a denial of the right of Israel to exist, which in turn is an expression of a desire for its destruction.

Of course, criticism of Israel is allowed, but it must pass the 3D test for antisemitism, which checks such criticism for antisemitic patterns of thinking:

- Is Israel demonised, e.g. equated to National Socialism?
- Is the existence of Israel delegitimised?
- Are double standards applied? In other words, are different yardsticks applied to Israel than to other countries?

If the answer to all three questions is no, the criticism is not antisemitic.

### Structural antisemitism

Antisemitism does not disappear, but comes back in a different form. In the case of structural antisemitism, the stereotypes of traditional antisemitism are transferred to other images of the enemy: an evil elite, for example, consisting of people who want to damage humanity. As with other forms of antisemitism, there is a desire to destroy an invented enemy: if it didn't exist, everything would be better.

This manifests itself in conspiracy theories and forms of economic criticism: if individual people or groups can be held responsible for structural problems, this is structural antisemitism. Patterns are identified where none exist.

If the following questions are answered in the affirmative, structural antisemitism is at play:

- In a narrative about evil people, elites or businesses, could these terms be replaced by the word “Jew” and are antisemitic stereotypes then evident?
- Does the narrative deliberately end with the idea that the world should be freed from them?

### Islamic antisemitism

In the Koran, there are both pro-Jewish and anti-Jewish passages; the latter are used as legitimisation in Islamic antisemitism. In those passages, Jews are presented as subordinate to Muslims. Islamic antisemitism also includes conspiracy theories and antisemitism relating to Israel. This form is often referred to as “imported antisemitism”. However, antisemitism is just as widespread in mainstream society, and Islamic antisemitism can only persist where antisemitism is already present.

The term is not intended to discredit people of the Muslim faith or Islam per se. The battle against antisemitism should not be exploited as a pretext to discriminate against Muslims.