

JEWS IN THE NETHERLANDS IN 2000

Summary of the results

Background

Since World War II, two studies have been conducted on Jews in the Netherlands (in 1954 and 1966, respectively). Both covered a limited scope and were purely demographic. With the exception of a recent social-demographic study on Israelis in the Netherlands (1996), information about Jews in the Netherlands of potential use in drafting policy was therefore virtually unavailable around 2000.

Accordingly, the Stichting Joods Maatschappelijk Werk (JMW, the Dutch Jewish Social Services) launched a study that in addition to revealing the demographics of Jews in the Netherlands addressed their ties with Judaism.

Structure and method

The study was intended to be based on a representative sample. For lack of a sampling frame, a modified, random sample was selected from the Dutch population: nearly forty thousand potentially Jewish names were identified in Dutch telephone directories according to a carefully described procedure to provide the ultimate sample group. These people were asked first in writing and then by telephone whether they pertained to the target group, and whether they would agree to an interview. If they did, an appointment was made for an oral interview. Jewish women with non-Jewish spouses and their children were added to the study through the snowball method, in which interviewees were asked to name such persons. The target group comprised people with at least one Jewish parent and converts to Judaism.

Altogether, 1,036 useful interviews were conducted averaging 2 hours each. The response rate was nearly 60 percent. The data underwent limited reassessment. Presumably, more involved Jews are slightly overrepresented in the sample.

Number, age structure and migration

Calculations indicate that about 43,000 Jews live in the Netherlands. By 2020 the number of Jews will decline by about 5 percent and will continue to age. The age structure of the Jewish population includes relatively few young adults (and their share is declining as well) and a disproportionately large number of people in their fifties (the post-war baby boom). The demographic structure of the Jewish population is very different from that of the Netherlands as a whole. Nearly half lives in and around Amsterdam. Since the war many have emigrated, especially to Israel (although many have returned from there as well) and the United States. Most have experience with migration themselves or have relatives that do. A substantial share of the Jews in the Netherlands comes from abroad. The main groups are Israelis (approximately 5,000 adults) and Russians (at least 900).

Relationships, marriages, intermarriages and children

Approximately 47 percent have two Jewish parents, 24 percent a Jewish mother and 29 percent a Jewish father. One percent has converted to Judaism. As far as relationships and children are concerned, Jews deviate considerably from the Dutch average. Many live alone. Women are especially likely to start cohabiting later on. A very large share is not married at age 30. Cohabitation as the initial form of relationships is becoming increasingly common

among Jews. Since the war, about 50 percent of *halachic* Jews have married other *halachic* Jews. Among those with a Jewish father, about 20 percent have a *halachic*-Jewish partner. Except for the youngest generation, men are more likely than women are to intermarry. Among the youngest generation, over 70 percent marry non-Jewish partners. Two main factors determine whether people marry Jewish partners: having two Jewish parents and being raised according to Jewish traditions. Among the respondents that cohabit, 55 to 60 percent have a non-Jewish partner. Their divorce rate is more than twice the average among the Dutch population overall.

Jewish women born after World War II start having children far later than the average for the Netherlands as a whole, which is already quite late (over 35 versus 28). About a third of the women born after 1955 is still childless at age 40. The rate is rising and is much higher than the overall rate in the Netherlands. The average number of children among Jewish women born after World War II is 1.5 (approximately 1.9 for the Netherlands as a whole).

Education, occupation, income and political views

Jews in the Netherlands tend to be very well educated: 53 percent have completed university or a polytechnic programme, compared with an overall Dutch average of 22 percent. Jewish women are more likely to be employed (64 versus 47 percent) and work longer than Dutch women in general. Many Jews have a scholarly profession (24 versus 9 percent for the Netherlands as a whole). The fields where they are heavily overrepresented are: a) medicine, law and economics; b) artistic and cultural occupations (art, journalism, media); c) trade (middle and upper management, owners of businesses). Their income is slightly above the average for the Netherlands. Their politics are progressive.

Well being

Well being is remarkable. *Assessment of satisfaction* on a scale of 1 to 10 yields an average of 7.3, which is roughly the same as the Dutch average. Among Jews of all ages, however, the score for *loneliness* is much higher than the Dutch average. There is no correlation with having lost relatives during the Holocaust, although there is with suffering from one's wartime experiences or those of one's parents.

Ties with Judaism

Dutch Judaism is primarily a cultural matter. Religion is secondary: about 5 percent are Orthodox and another 20 percent religious. Seventeen percent are not religious but do keep certain traditions. The remaining 57 percent are not observant at all. By far the most important *reason* for celebrating the holidays is to express a bond with Jewish tradition. Enjoyment is a distant second. Religious convictions are not an important factor. The most popular religious traditions are eating *matzes* and performing a Seder. The *halacha* (i.e. Jewish law) is secondary in determining whether people consider someone Jewish: most consider a person Jewish if he or she has at least one Jewish parent and – most important of all – feels Jewish.

A clear majority would regret the decline of the Jewish community. A close majority believes that the Jewish community needs to take measures to secure its future, whereas a minority considers this a matter of personal choice. The priorities suggested for Jewish organizations include enriching Jewish culture, becoming more active, promoting Jewish family life and improving access to non-*halachic* Jews.

The influence of World War II, ties with their parents and the fact that their parent or parents are Jewish figure prominently in Jewish identity. Even today, 51 percent have problems

related to their wartime experiences or those of their parents. Anti-Semitism is also very important, as are ties with Israel. Jews in the Netherlands may take a critical view but nevertheless have very strong ties with Israel, especially the older generation. As far as social surroundings are concerned, only 12 percent have no Jewish friends at all.

Twenty-eight percent belong to a Jewish congregation. Their primary *motive* for joining is to perpetuate an organized Jewish community. Tradition and social motives are also valued. The most frequently visited institution is the Jewish Historical Museum (66 percent), followed by one or more of the activities of JMW (42 percent) and the WIZO (40 percent). Over two thirds watch or listen to television or radio broadcasts or attend performances about Jewish subjects. Programmes about Israel draw the most interest.

A closer look at Jewish ties

Two dimensions emerge from the ties with Judaism: one positive (which is less religious than social-cultural) and the other negative (defined by war and anti-Semitism). The different indicators of ties with Judaism tend to relate to these dimensions, i.e. if people express their identification with Judaism in one specific field (e.g. watching Jewish television programmes), they often express these ties in other fields as well (e.g. visiting Israel).

Finally, ties with Judaism appear to be deeply influenced by having a Jewish partner. In turn, this relates to being raised with Jewish traditions and having two Jewish parents.

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