



OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

Short projects and grassroots initiatives to address anti-Semitism activities supported by the “Words into Action to Address Anti-Semitism” project



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Introduction

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) participating States have made numerous commitments to preventing and responding to manifestations of anti-Semitism and other acts of intolerance, or discrimination against Christians, Muslims and members of other religions.

The OSCE's 2014 Basel Ministerial Council Declaration No. 8 on Enhancing Efforts to Combat Anti-Semitism specifically tasked the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to:

- offer to participating States best practices on efforts to counter anti-Semitism, including by consulting civil society, to effectively identify and address contemporary manifestations of anti-Semitism;
- facilitate the exchange of best practices among participating States on educational initiatives and other measures to raise awareness of anti-Semitism and overcome challenges to Holocaust education; and
- promote dialogue and strengthen the capacity of civil society to foster mutual respect and understanding in order to advance the cause of co-operation between different communities.

In 2016, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) launched a multi-year project on "Turning Words into Action to Address Anti-Semitism" to help OSCE participating States follow through on their commitment to prevent and address anti-Semitism. To this end, ODIHR has developed transferable tools and disseminated good practices in three key fields: security, education and coalition building.

In June 2016, ODIHR issued a call for proposals to identify short projects developed by civil society organizations that aimed to address anti-Semitism through education or coalition building. The idea was to support and empower civil society working at the grass-roots level, as well as to learn about the good practices and experiences of civil society across the OSCE region in addressing anti-Semitism through education and coalition building. Projects that took a human rights-based approach were particularly encouraged.

ODIHR received a total of 54 applications in response to the call. Funding was provided to eight projects identified as promoting good practices. The eight projects were conducted between September and November 2016 in Belgium, France, Germany, Poland, Serbia, Ukraine and the United Kingdom. A further two projects were funded in 2017 in Sweden and Belgium, while funding for a project launched in Poland in 2016 was extended through 2017.

The short projects all addressed anti-Semitism through local and grass-roots efforts, and revealed how much can be achieved with determination and targeted funding. The knowledge and experience gained in these short projects fed into other "Words into Action" project activities, including the development of education policy guidelines, curricula, guidance

materials for teacher training, teaching aids and a guide to coalition building. Not only did the projects provide examples of good practices in addressing anti-Semitism, but they also contributed to ODIHR's gender mainstreaming agenda, including by drawing attention to female role models in history. A meeting was held on 25 November 2016, during which the civil society organizations involved in the project shared their good practices, information and established contacts for future co-operation.

Lessons learned:

- New avenues for communication and intercultural dialogue, especially between Muslims and Jews, can be opened up if discussions about anti-Semitism are accompanied by conversations about shared life experiences, including marginalization and discrimination.
- When representatives of a group focus overtly on the group's victimization, this can act as a barrier to co-operation. Meanwhile, approaching partners with respect and as equals facilitates the sharing of experiences.
- Creating art, cooking or sharing food are often uncontroversial and enjoyable ways for local communities to engage with each other and a good entry point for better mutual understanding.
- Small amounts of money can result in significant change and have a lasting impact on local communities. However, retaining the positive effects of civil society initiatives requires that good practices be collected systematically, as local initiatives too often rely on a small number of dedicated individuals.
- Holocaust education alone is not enough to address anti-Semitism in school settings, as students often lack the personal links or empathy to understand the relevance of the problem. Educational practices and projects that integrate personal history provide these links, fostering empathy and a better understanding of the evils of anti-Semitism and xenophobia.
- Support for teachers and the development of teaching materials is relevant, but the problem of anti-Semitism in education needs to be addressed at a higher institutional level by engaging the heads of schools and government officials.
- Citizenship education has been found to both strengthen democracy and open up pathways for co-operation between state education institutions and relevant civil society organizations.



Figure 1. Presenting “Ester” – an interactive teaching guide about the Holocaust and anti-Semitism – during the short project exchange workshop held in Warsaw, 25 November 2016.

Projects addressing anti-Semitism through coalition building

Organization name: Jugend- & Kulturprojekt e.V. – Dresden, Germany
(<http://www.jkpev.de/>).

Project name: SELC – Shoot. Edit. Learn & Connect.

Project goal: To address fear and racism towards Muslims and Jews in Dresden through cultural interaction and producing a set of educational videos.

The project brought together five civil society organizations and government institutions that facilitate joint activities between newly arrived refugees and migrants. These include simple cultural or creative activities, such as cooking and art, and the co-production of educational videos. The short films contained personal reflections about tolerance, discrimination and human rights, and aimed to address these issues by exploring individual experiences. The films were screened at four public events attended by local people, refugees and migrants. These meetings provided the opportunity for the public to see the films and engage in discussions about discrimination, tolerance and what it means to be different.

By setting the personal experiences, hopes, and anxieties of Jewish, Muslim and Christian men and women side by side, the videos transformed cultural and gender differences into similarities, promoting empathy and understanding. The mediation of life histories through art helped people to overcome their fears and stereotypes. Through art, the project promoted tolerance and understanding between people of different faiths and eased the integration of newcomers into Dresden's social life.



Figure 2. Participants in an art exhibition and meeting organized by the Jugend- & Kulturprojekt e.V., Dresden.

Organization name: Zentralwohlfahrtsstelle der Juden in Deutschland (ZWST) – Germany (<http://www.zwst.org/>).

Project name: Symposium on “Talking and Keeping Silent about Anti-Semitism”.

Project goal: To develop joint strategies and forge sustainable networks within both Jewish and non-Jewish communities across Germany, with the aim of addressing anti-Semitism.

The symposium brought together 88 activists (54 women, 34 men) for two days of workshops and panel discussions. Jewish activists were joined by LGBT and feminist activists to reflect on the current lack of public and political debate about anti-Semitism, the insufficient awareness of the topic in non-formal education and possible ways to empower communities against racist and xenophobic crimes. In particular, workshops on “Homeland of the Homeland-less” and “AVIVA: Empowerment through Media Visibility” addressed the intersection of gender and discrimination and provided safe spaces for women to share their experiences.

The symposium gathered Jewish participants representing different religious and ethnic strands of the German Jewish community, as well as representatives of educational institutions and other vulnerable groups, including LGBT groups and ethnic minorities. It addressed a broad set of issues and linked activists with stakeholders to pave the way for future co-operation and coalitions. The symposium also helped the ZWST to define its future activities and identify the most pressing issues facing the Jewish community in Germany.



Figure 3. A panel discussion held during the symposium organized by ZWST. From left to right: Julia Bernstein, University of Frankfurt, Meron Mendel, Anne Frank Educational Centre, Moderator Marina Chernivsky, Dani Kranz, the University of Wuppertal. (Photo credit: Margrit Schmidt)

Organization name: 3FF Three Faiths Forum – the United Kingdom
(<http://www.3ff.org.uk/>).

Project name: Hate on Campus: Challenges and Opportunities.

Project goal: To map and raise awareness of religion-based hate expressions on university campuses across the United Kingdom.

The project to map student experiences on university campuses involved a broad range of stakeholders, including academics from Coventry University, representatives of the National Union of Students, the Union of Jewish Students and the Federation of Student Islamic Societies. An “Interfaith Summit” was held on 17 November 2016 and provided a safe space for around 400 participants to discuss their experiences of religion-based hate while drawing on the input of the academics and student bodies involved in the project. The insights shared during the summit will be used to develop a methodology to build bridges between different faith-based communities (mainly Jews and Muslims) and address religion-based hate on university campuses across the United Kingdom.

The summit resulted in an initiative to establish an organization aimed at addressing the lack of mental health services in faith communities.

Organization name: The Union of French Jewish Students (UEJF) – Paris, France
(<http://uejf.org/>).

Project name: Training and empowering French youth against anti-Semitism.

Project goal: To encourage dialogue and understanding between the Jewish and non-Jewish youth in suburban areas of Paris.

The UEJF organized six *Sukkot* festivals in different suburbs of Paris that were attended by up to 800 people. In particular, the festivals brought together Jews and Muslims to share food, and helped to promote Jewish culture and establish intercultural dialogue. For many of the non-Jewish participants, the festivals were their first experience of a Jewish holiday. The friendly atmosphere and positive feedback showed that the initiative helped to overcome prejudices.

The project also addressed the needs of Jewish communities in a targeted “Dialogue Convention” held in Marseille. The convention brought together 100 Jewish students and high-profile speakers for active discussions about the Holocaust and ways to fight contemporary forms of extremism and populism. It also opened up avenues for future co-operation between activists, film-makers and local politicians.

Organization name: Amanah Project – Malmo, Sweden (<http://amanah.se/>).

Project name: A Jewish-Muslim Trust and Faith project.

Project goal: To build trust between Jews and Muslims in Sweden and strengthen understanding of their religion, traditions and culture.

Amanah helps to foster dialogue and promote tolerance and goodwill between the Jewish and Muslim communities in Sweden. As part of the project, two seminars were held on the interactive textual comparison of Jewish and Muslim traditions, focusing on ritual circumcision and the story of Abraham to highlight the common ground of these religious communities. The seminars brought together a total of 155 participants (76 women, 79 men) who were encouraged to develop joint agendas to confront intolerance. In addition, the project organized a professional convention for 25 physicians, legal experts and theologians from throughout Scandinavia on the topic of ritual circumcision. By focusing on the current state of affairs regarding circumcision in Sweden and discussing the shared meaning of circumcision in Jewish and Muslim traditions, the event made significant strides in fostering interfaith dialogue.

Following the success of these activities, the Amanah project received funding from the Malmo municipality to bring together different religious communities for similar activities in 2018.

Organization name: European Jewish Community Centre (EJCC) – Brussels, Belgium (<http://ejcc.eu/>).

Project name: Promoting tolerance through interfaith dialogue.

Project goal: To promote interfaith dialogue and understanding between different religious communities.

The EJCC held three events in 2017 that gathered members of Jewish and other religious communities to foster interfaith dialogue and links between these groups. In particular, the EJCC held a *Shauvot/Iftar* meal in Brussels on 30 May 2017, organized in co-operation with ODIHR, the European Union of Jewish Students, the European Parliament Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup and the European Parliament Working Group on Antisemitism. The dinner itself brought together 70 (39 women, 31 men) Jewish and Muslim community representatives to discuss their ideas on tolerance and co-existence as expressed in the *Torah* and the *Quran*. This discussion facilitated interfaith dialogue by giving participants an opportunity to discuss the common or converging ideas expressed in their respective religious texts and to consider the long history of Jewish and Muslim co-existence.

In December 2017, the EJCC held a joint lunch for Catholic, Jewish, Muslim and non-religious women. The 27 participants reflected on their family origins and how they came to be in Brussels and to establish deeper personal connections. They also discussed the role that they can play as women to strengthen understanding among different religious communities.

In the same month, the EJCC brought together 30 Jewish and Muslim business people for an intercultural dinner. The event helped participants to establish new connections and build interfaith business networks. The EJCC also planned follow-up events in 2018.



Figure 4. The *Shauvot/Iftar* meal held for Muslim and Jewish activists from across Europe on 30 May 2017.

Projects addressing anti-Semitism through education

Organization name: Centropa – Austria and Ukraine (<http://www.centropa.org>).

Project name: Centropa International Teachers’ Seminar: digital storytelling, anti-Semitism and tolerance in the borderless classroom.

Project goal: To expand Centropa’s engagement in Ukraine by providing learning opportunities for Ukrainian teachers.

Centropa works to empower teachers, create a pan-European network of teachers and promote local Jewish heritage. On 30 October 2017, a teacher-training seminar was held in Ukraine as part of a broader project – a travelling exhibition on “The Ukrainian Jewish Family Album: Pictures and Stories from Centropa Interviews in Ukraine”. The seminar was delivered by six (3 women, 3 men) Centropa teachers from Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Poland and Slovakia. The seminar looked at how teachers can address anti-Semitism and promote Holocaust education. 43 teachers (32 women, 11 men) participated in the training and the accompanying visit to the Babi Yar mass killing site. After the training, the teachers said they felt better qualified and more confident to teach about the Holocaust and address expressions of anti-Semitism in the classroom, as well as to carry out research projects on local Jewish history to share with others. Following the event, Centropa received invitations from schools across Ukraine to host the travelling photo exhibition.



Figure 1. A presentation held as part of Centropa’s teacher-training seminar in Ukraine, 30 October 2017.

Organization name: Fondation MERCI – Belgium (<https://www.facebook.com/lamerci.be/>).

Project name: If Schindler were Muslim...

Project goal: To use Holocaust education to promote peaceful relations between Muslim and Jewish communities and to raise awareness of the problems of prejudice and anti-Semitism in Belgium.

The project combined different activities that shed light on previously forgotten themes in the history of the Holocaust while promoting the concepts of universality and tolerance. As part of the project, a photo exhibition titled “Besa: Code of Honour” was held that told the story of Albanian Muslims who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. Meanwhile, a screening of the film “Turkish Passport” documented the efforts of Turkish diplomats to save European Jews. These activities aimed to bring Jewish and Muslim communities together and to challenge the belief that relations between them have historically been characterized by enmity. Meanwhile, a three-day conference (2-4 November 2016) organized in co-operation with Yad Vashem gathered more than 73 (39 women, 34 men) educators, public officials and others to discuss the links between teaching about the Holocaust and education to promote human rights and tolerance. It covered a range of topics, including anti-Semitic stereotypes and prejudice, teaching about the Righteous of the Nations and other topics in history of the Holocaust in Belgium. The educators were also introduced to effective teaching techniques that would help students make the connection between past events and the importance of tolerance and human rights today. The project was endorsed by high-level Belgian officials, indicating a need and willingness to multiply such efforts.

The success of this conference inspired the Fondation MERCI to organize a similar event in November 2017 on the Holocaust and other genocides.

Organization name: Humanity in Action – Poland and the United States (<https://www.humanityinaction.org/Poland>).

Project name: (In)visible Diversity: Encounter, Empower & Exchange.

Project goal: To develop replicable teaching tools that deepen students’ knowledge of the Holocaust and anti-Semitism, and to build networks among and empower (mostly female) youth activists.

Humanity in Action developed and held games on Jewish heritage in six Polish cities, produced seven short films, including three on Jewish “superwomen”, and created an interactive, wreck-this-journal-style book on Jews in Poland. The education materials highlighted the shared Polish-Jewish past and provided a counter-narrative to the growing public perception of Jewish people as “others” in Poland. The process of developing the project materials also provided an opportunity to raise awareness of anti-Semitism and discrimination among Polish education professionals.

A total of 162 young people (126 women, 36 men) took part in the outdoor games held in Katowice, Krakow, Poznan, Warsaw, Wroclaw and Zielona Gora, the aim of which was to encourage youth to reflect critically on the role of ethnic and religious minorities in Polish society in the past and present. The four short documentaries were screened both in public and online, reaching an audience of approximately 2,360 people. Between 18 and 20 November 2016, an exchange seminar was held for 30 educators (21 women, 9 men) to learn about the materials developed as part of the project, with the aim of ensuring that the materials are effectively used to address anti-Semitism and promote tolerance.

Since the project ended, 10,000 copies of the interactive book have been re-printed and distributed to educators and young people by the non-governmental organization Forum for Dialogue and the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in co-operation with 76 libraries across Poland.



Figure 2. A participant in Humanity in Action’s city game holds a copy of the interactive educational book produced in co-operation with the Turning Words into Action project. (OSCE/Humanity In Action)

Organization name: Terraforming South – Serbia (<http://terraforming.org/> and <https://ester.rs/>).

Project name: The Holocaust In Belgrade – A Story About The Old Fairground.

Project goal: To promote tolerance and address anti-Semitism by developing online teaching materials and methods for high schools focused on the history of Belgrade during the Holocaust.

As part of the project, a 40-page teaching guide titled “Ester” was produced that centred on the story of three families from Belgrade during the Holocaust, as well as on two contemporary stories. The project used the form of a graphic novel to address both the history of the Holocaust and contemporary expressions of anti-Semitism. This new methodology for teaching about the Holocaust and anti-Semitism is suitable for use in Serbia and beyond. The teaching guide covers anti-Semitism, propaganda, gender perspectives, friendship, identity, perpetrators, collaborators and other topics. To complement the teaching guide, a package of multimedia, teaching and learning resources, including a website and e-books, was produced and is available in English and Serbian (<https://ester.rs/>). The materials were presented at events in Belgrade and Amsterdam.

In 2017, Terraforming South joined forces with the Serbian branch of the European Association of History Educators (EUROCLIO) – the Association for Social History (UDI-EUROCLIO), which has more than 500 active members in Serbia – to include “Ester” in the organization’s standard annual training programme and, to this end, to prepare a group of UDI-EUROCLIO trainers. This will ensure that Serbian teachers know how to integrate the resource into their history classes.

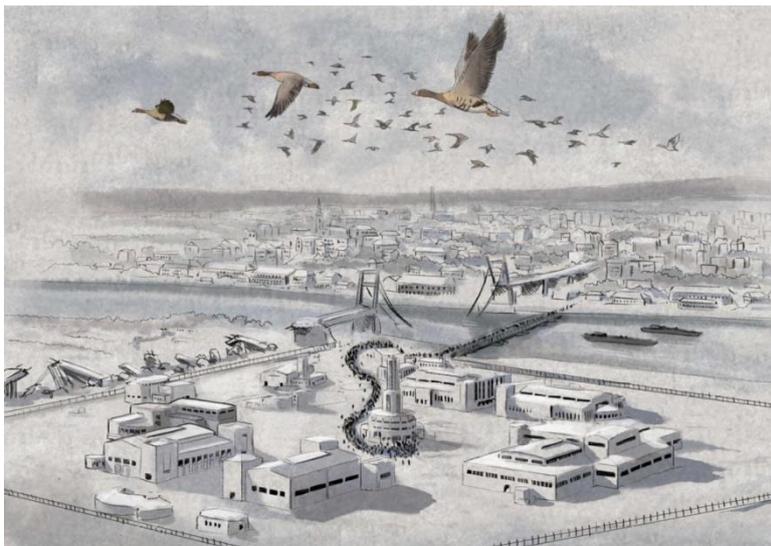


Figure 3. An illustration from “Ester” – Terraforming South’s 40-page teaching guide developed by historians, pedagogues, teachers and illustrators to accompany Holocaust education curricula. (OSCE/Terraforming South)