

Presenter: Daniel Staetsky, Institute for Jewish Policy Research

Title: “**How much antisemitism is really there? A ‘continuous’ view of antisemitism**”

Panel: Sociology and Social Sciences

Time after time, surveys of attitudes towards Jews show that antisemitism in the English-speaking world and Western Europe remains relatively low. Yet, significant majorities of Jews across Western Europe consider antisemitism to be a big and increasing problem. This is reflected by the surveys of Jewish perceptions and experiences of antisemitism, which indicate high levels of concern about antisemitism, and by communal discourse, eg. Jewish newspapers, where the topic of antisemitism remains prominent. How does one explain the apparently low levels of antisemitism and the apparently high levels of anxiety about it among Jews? Admittedly, there is not a ‘formula’ that links the levels of anti-Jewish attitudes held by non-Jews to the levels of Jewish anxieties, but the question is still legitimate: is the Jewish view ‘disproportionate’ in relation to the real extent of the problem of antisemitism?

The study of antisemitism, this author maintains, lacks a theory and a methodology of measurement, and the problem of ‘bridging’ between the attitudes of non-Jews and Jewish anxieties owes partly to this fundamental omission. This talk will address the question of ‘how much’ antisemitism is really there’ in way that is novel in the field of the study of antisemitism, and that goes considerably way to better understanding of Jewish anxieties about antisemitism. The talk will present a detailed study of the spread of various antisemitic ideas and attitudes, building on a largest-ever survey of attitudes towards Jews and Israel conducted by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research in winter 2017 in the United Kingdom.

The talk will develop a ‘*continuous view*’ of antisemitism. The ‘continuous view’ arises from accounting for two conventional points in the study of attitudes. First, questions on opinions about religious, ethnic and racial groups are *sensitive*, i.e. they are politically charged, can be considered offensive and give reasons to doubting the truthfulness of responses. They are also based on the assumption that interviewees possess a rather advanced degree of knowledge and opinion on a given subject matter. Vast academic literature provides examples of the way sensitivity and genuine lack of opinion interferes with proper measurement. Second, at an individual level, antisemitism is an

attitude. By definition, attitudes are rich and complex, and so the measurement of attitudes ought to take into account their inherently multifaceted nature. In view of these two points, an approach measuring antisemitic attitudes based on just a single survey question-for example, a question of how favourable the respondents' opinion of Jews is- would be naïve in the extreme. Instead, in thinking about how to measure prevalence of antisemitism a flexible view of this phenomenon should be adopted, allowing for varying intensity of emotions and circumstances under which these were measured to enter the picture. Further, in keeping with the tradition of research of social attitudes, the multifaceted nature of attitudes should be accounted for.

The continuous view of antisemitism is not the end but rather the beginning of the foundational work in methodology of measurement of antisemitism – a project with the broader purpose of increasing the scientific quality of the study of antisemitism and lending it predictive capacity.