



SAFE WORSHIP IN EUROPE

INCIDENTS AGAINST PLACES OF WORSHIP
IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

MAY 2023

2023



Enhancing Faith Institutions:

EFI is a social enterprise that aims to support and strengthen faith-based communities in Europe and across the world. EFI provides technical, practical, and strategic advice for faith communities on an individual, institutional, and theological level.

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ABBREVIATIONS

EFI	Enhancing Faith Institutions
EU	European Union
FRA	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
ISF	Internal Security Fund
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
POW	Place of Worship
SOAR	Strengthening the Security and Resilience of At-risk Religious Sites and Communities Programme
UN	United Nations
UNOC	United Nations Alliance of Civilizations



FORWARD



In order to effectively address the problem of hate crimes targeting Places of Worship, it is vital to first understand its nature and scale.

DEAR STAKEHOLDERS,

Freedom of religion or belief is a fundamental right. It is a right provided for in numerous international, regional, and national conventions and laws, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

There are also specific provisions for the protection of religious sites, such as UN General Assembly Resolution 55/224, which calls on Member States to ensure provision of safe places of worship.

The European Union is similarly committed to protecting religious sites from terrorist attacks, hate crimes, and other incidents. Again, this commitment is reflected in various strategies and action plans. *The 2020 Counter-Terrorism Agenda for the EU: Anticipate, Prevent, Protect, Respond*, for example, acknowledges the symbolic importance of places of worship and their vulnerability. It calls for cooperation between faith communities and national authorities, and commits the European Commission to supporting projects aimed at the provision of enhanced security at places of worship.

One of these is the Strengthening the Security and Resilience of At-risk Religious Sites and Communities Programme (SOAR), funded through the Commission's Internal Security Fund (ISF). SOAR is being undertaken by a consortium led by EFI. Its objective is to strengthen the security and resilience of at-risk religious sites and communities in the EU. But the programme is also research-oriented, and provides a platform for knowledge exchange and sharing of best practices among diverse stakeholders.

Why the need for SOAR? Year on year, hate crimes are rising in Europe, especially those directed at places of worship. The OSCE Hate Crime Reporting shows that out of 27 EU member states, 12 reported an increase in hate crimes in 2020 (data for some EU states is missing). Attacks against places of worship do not just affect the individuals physically located within or around the facility. Rather they negatively impact the entire community, and when the main motivation is hate, society as a whole is at risk of polarisation. It should also be stressed that this is not a problem of one community (although certain communities are more vulnerable in certain contexts), but a challenge facing ALL religious communities.

Moreover, the actual numbers are likely to be far higher – due in part to under-reporting by affected communities who have a lack of trust in the police. In Austria, for example, police recorded 52 religious hate crimes in 2020 while non-state actors recorded 202 (OSCE Hate Crime Reporting, n.d.). This points to an information gap with regard to data on incidents. It is this gap that EFI has identified during implementation of the SOAR project and is what has prompted this report.

In order to effectively address the problem of hate crimes targeting places of worship, it is vital to first understand its nature and scale. This report is part of EFI's efforts to do so. It aims to inform policy makers, religious leaders, local authorities, relevant stakeholders and the wider public about the situation with regard to attacks against places of worship/religious sites. It is hoped that, by providing a more accurate picture of the challenges faced, it can help in finding solutions and thereby in ensuring freedom of worship for all communities in Europe.

Shaukat Warraich

Co-Director, Enhancing Faith Institutions



Executive SUMMARY

Freedom of religion or belief is a fundamental human right, provided for in various international and regional conventions and national laws. Similar provisions are in place for the protection of places of worship. Despite this, hate crimes, including those targeting religious communities and places of worship are on the rise in Europe. Such incidents have massive negative effects on those directly involved, their families, the wider community and, ultimately, society as a whole. Moreover, they are not confined to one religious community, but rather involve ALL religions and all kinds of places of worship.

For various reasons, notably lack of trust in the police, hate crimes directed at religious communities and places of worship are significantly under-reported. It is important to have an accurate understanding of the nature and scale of the problem in order to effectively address it.

This report looks at incidents of hate crime directed towards places of worship in the 27 countries of the European Union over a 12-month period from June 2021 until May 2022.

THE AIM

The aim of the study was to present policy makers and stakeholders with an accurate picture of the situation with regard to incidents against places of worship, raise awareness of the issue, and help ensure more effective design and implementation of interventions to combat such incidents.



KEY FINDINGS

OVERALL NUMBERS BY COUNTRY

607 incidents were identified over the 12 months assessed with the highest frequency seen in France (182 incidents) and Italy (102 incidents). Numbers were far lower in other countries (can be attributed to low reporting of incidents), while no incidents were identified in Luxembourg.

FINDINGS BY RELIGION

Christian places of worship comprised the vast majority (965 incidents), followed by Muslim (70 incidents) and Jewish (62 incidents) places of worship.

GERMANY

A different methodology was adopted for Germany, making use of data provided through government websites in that country, which were not available in other EU countries. Hence the German results cannot be compared with those of the other 26 EU countries. A total of 499 incidents were identified in Germany over the 12 months assessed.

TYPE OF INCIDENTS

Type of incidents varies according to religious community. Thus, Christian places of worship were largely affected by theft (sometimes accompanied by damage/desecration), indicating that the motive was financial gain rather than strong anti-Christian sentiment. By comparison, cases involving Muslim and Jewish places of worship largely entailed smearing and damage – suggesting that the aim was to convey hostility, even to instil fear.

DISTRIBUTION ACROSS INDIVIDUAL COUNTRIES

More detailed analysis of the three countries with the highest prevalence of incidents – Germany, France, and Italy – shows that in Germany, most took place in the West of the country, possibly due to people there being more religious than in the East. In France incidents were more evenly geographically distributed (albeit less in central regions of the country), while in Italy there were somewhat more in the north than the south.

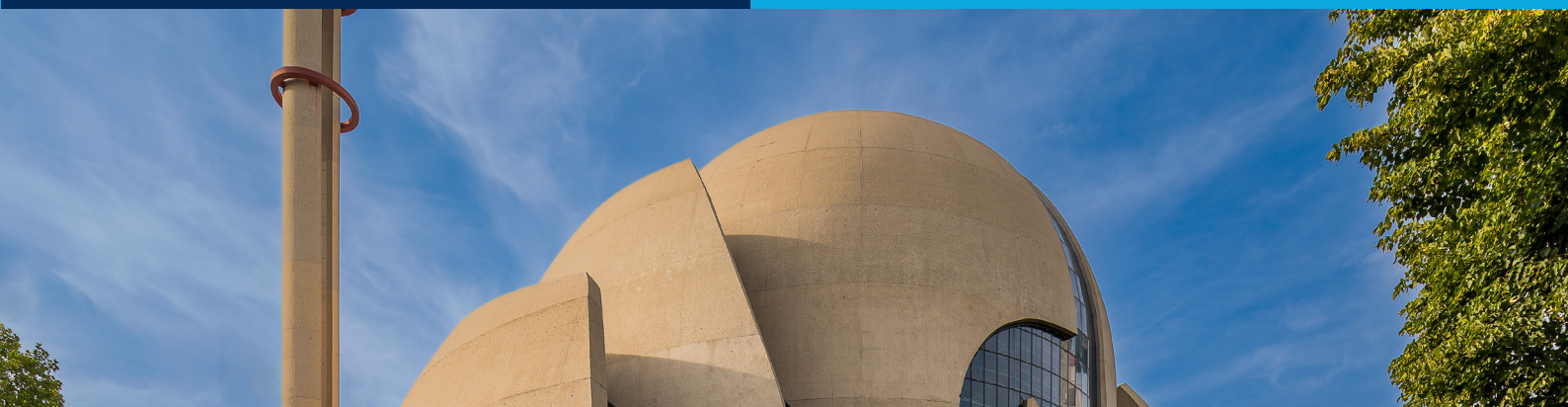


REPORTING TO POLICE

Of the 1,106 incidents in the study, 911 were reported to police. However, this high proportion could be due to the fact that many incidents were identified from police/other government websites.

PROFILE OF SUSPECTS/PERPETRATORS

Available data on perpetrators/suspects shows that most incidents involved sole attackers, or just two; a very small proportion of incidents had multiple perpetrators. The biggest share of perpetrators were either teenagers or young adults.

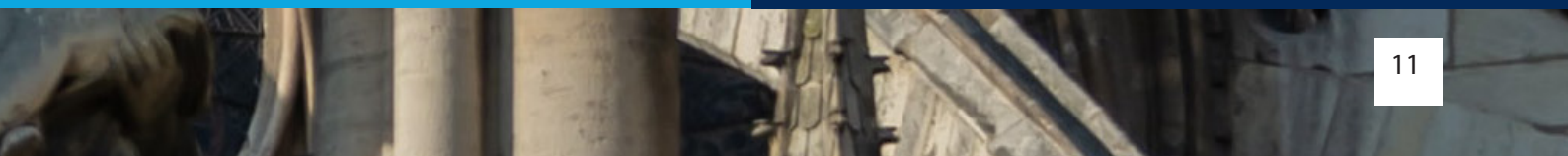


MONTHLY VARIATION

Some variation was seen by month, with higher frequency of attacks in December-January, and in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine (March, April and May 2022).

STATE RESPONSES

In all three countries, governments were taking steps to combat such attacks. Germany has provided the Central Council of Jews with a significant grant to improve security in synagogues/ other Jewish institutions. France also has provisions to fund security and other measures for protection of places of worship, and the French police are mobilised around religious festivals/ events. In both France and Italy places of worship are also protected as part of wider operations for protection of public places/sensitive sites.



This study confirms that hate crime against places of worship is a serious problem in Europe. While some countries are beginning to address the issue, far more is needed: real change will only be achieved if Member States show serious resolve and much greater effort.

RECOMMENDATIONS

GENERAL

1. Promote cooperation between religious communities, civil society, local authorities and law enforcement.
2. Promote interreligious dialogue.
3. Follow the UNAOC's *Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites: In Unity and Solidarity for Safe and Peaceful Worship*.
4. Provide resources for security.
5. Promote reporting of incidents.

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

1. Conduct risk assessments of places of worship.
2. Carry out security training for personnel in places of worship.
3. Carry out security training for faith leaders.
4. Appoint security officers/advisors for each religious community.
5. Implement the 'Security by Design (SBD)' concept.

GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND POLICY MAKERS

1. Include religious communities in the process of policy-making.
2. Provide intercultural sensitivity training for law enforcement agencies.
3. Improve recording of hate crimes.
4. Identify and address the wider issues that cause incidents against places of worship.



OUR WORLD HAS WITNESSED A
TRAGIC SURGE IN ANTI-SEMITISM,
ANTI-MUSLIM HATRED, ATTACKS ON
CHRISTIANS AND VIOLENCE
TARGETING MEMBERS OF OTHER
FAITHS AND TRADITIONS.

António Guterres
United Nations Secretary-General

1. INTRODUCTION



1.1 Commitments to Freedom of Religion and Protection of Places of Worship

The right of the individual to freely practise their religion is protected under international law. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948 states:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

It is also reaffirmed in Article 9 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950). On 31 May 2001, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 55/254 on the “Protection of Religious Sites”, which calls upon Member States to protect religious sites from acts of violence. This was followed on 18 December 2013 by UN General Assembly Resolution 68/169 on “Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief”.

In order to support Member States’ efforts to ensure the provision of safe worship in religious sites, the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations (UNAOC) published *United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites: In Unity and Solidarity for Safe and Peaceful Worship*. The Plan discusses prevention, preparedness and response and provides a set of recommendations for the UN, Member States, religious leaders, civil society and online providers.



Similarly, the European Union is committed to ensuring freedom of religion and protecting religious sites from terrorist attacks, hate crimes and other incidents. Article 10 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000) includes freedom of religion. The *EU Security Union Strategy (2020)* and the *EU Action Plan to Support the Protection of Public Spaces (2017)* highlight the importance of the protection of places of worship. The *2020 Counter-Terrorism Agenda for the EU: Anticipate, Prevent, Protect, Respond* acknowledges the symbolic importance of places of worship and their vulnerability. It calls for cooperation between faith communities and national authorities, whilst the EU Commission in turn will support projects aimed at the provision of enhanced security at places of worship.

In 2021 the European Commission launched the Internal Security Fund (ISF), aimed at contributing to ensuring a high level of security in the European Union. The ISF has a broad security mandate: preventing and combating terrorism and radicalisation, serious and organised crime, and cybercrime; assisting and protecting victims of crime; and preparing for, protecting against and effectively managing security related incidents, risks and crises (European Commission, n.d.). Protection of places of worship clearly falls within these parameters.

One of the projects being funded through ISF is the Strengthening the Security and Resilience of At-risk Religious Sites and Communities Programme (SOAR). This is being carried out by a consortium led by Enhancing Faith Institutions (EFI). Other partners are Finn Church Aid, and Architects Council of Europe. SOAR's objective is to strengthen the security and resilience of at-risk religious sites and communities in the EU. The programme provides risk assessment services and protective security awareness training for personnel in places of worship, faith leaders and women and youth. SOAR's activities are also research oriented; it provides a platform for knowledge exchange and sharing of best practices, targeted at diverse stakeholders including faith leaders, volunteers, community members, law enforcement agencies and local authorities.

1.2 RISE IN HATE CRIMES IN EUROPE, INCLUDING AGAINST PLACES OF WORSHIP

The need for programmes like SOAR is clear from analysis of hate crime data in Europe. Year on year, incidents of hate crimes – including those directed against places of worship – are on the rise. In 2019, during Yom Kippur, a 27-year-old individual opened fire at a synagogue in Halle, Germany. The perpetrator killed two people and broadcasted his attack online shouting anti-Semitic comments (BBC, 2019). In 2020, three people were killed in a terrorist attack on a church in Nice, France (BBC, 2020). In January 2022, an explosion targeted a mosque in Athens (Proto Thema, 2022). The experience of a cyclist attacked while going to a mosque in Dublin is given in Box 1.

1

BOX 1: ATTACKED WHILE CYCLING TO THE MOSQUE

It was a warm spring day when John (not his real name) left his home, hopped on his bike and started cycling towards his local mosque. It was a typical day: work, friends, family and prayer. However, it would become a day that changed John's life and the life of his community. As he was riding his bike, he was stopped by eight people. John was pushed to the ground and severely beaten. The only thing John could do was scream for help. It was one of those moments that last a lifetime. Mosque worshipers heard his call and rushed to his aid. John is now in hospital, trying to recover from his injuries, while his community ask themselves: Who is next? Will we hear the call for help next time? Are they going to target us again? Are we safe? How can we be safe?

Source: (Surve, 2022)

BOX 2: HATE CRIME AGAINST A SYNAGOGUE

It was supposed to be an event of awareness, tolerance, and remembrance, yet hate has found a way in. The city of Malmö, Sweden was holding the International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism when the Jewish community in the city was the target of a hate crime. “The Holocaust was a scam” message was projected on the main Malmö synagogue. Such acts have the power to retraumatize a community and should not be accepted.

(Jewish News, 2021)

There are hundreds of such cases each year. And worryingly, figures are on the rise. The OSCE Hate Crime Reporting shows that out of 27 EU member states, 12 reported an increase in hate crimes in 2020 (data for some EU states is missing). For example, German police recorded 10,240 incidents of hate crimes in 2020, up from 8,585 in 2019. Similarly, police in the Netherlands recorded 2,133 hate crimes in 2020 compared to 2,016 in 2019. Such attacks/incidents are hugely detrimental. They don’t just affect those directly involved (people located within or around the place of worship): rather, they negatively impact families as a whole, and the entire community, creating an atmosphere of fear in which people don’t feel free to practise their religion openly, or even to fully participate in public life. When the main motivation is hate, society as a whole is at risk of polarisation. It should also be stressed that this is not a problem of one community (although certain communities are more vulnerable in certain contexts than others): rather it is a challenge for ALL religious communities.

The increase in hate crime, including hate crimes against places of worship, is thus a source of serious concern. Moreover, the actual numbers are likely to be far higher. *Encouraging Hate Crime Reporting* by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA, 2021) points to underreporting and a lack of trust in police by affected communities. In these circumstances civil society can play an active role in assisting victims of hate crimes to report what has happened to them. Individuals belonging to religious communities appear to have more trust in religious umbrella organisations, NGOs, and other non-state actors, than in the police. In Austria, for example, the police recorded 52 religious hate crimes in 2020 while non-state actors recorded 202 (OSCE Hate Crime Reporting, n.d.). This points to an information gap with regard to data on incidents. In order to effectively address the problem of hate crimes targeting places of worship, it is vital to first understand its nature and scale.

1.3 OBJECTIVES AND OUTLINE OF REPORT

EFI has identified the gap in data on incidents of hate crimes against places of worship. It is what prompted this report, which documents the scale and types of hate crimes perpetrated against places of worship in Europe over a one-year period. The objectives of the report are to:

- **Present policy makers, religious leaders, local authorities, relevant stakeholders and the wider public with an accurate picture of the situation with regard to such attacks.**
- **Promote awareness of the scale and urgency of the problem, and spark wider discussion around protection of religious sites, as well as hate crimes in general.**
- **By contributing to the evidence base on attacks on religious sites in Europe, help ensure more effective design and implementation of interventions/ measures to combat such attacks.**

The ultimate goal is to promote protection of places of worship in Europe, and thereby fulfil the commitments to freedom of religion or belief to which European countries have signed up.

The EFI plan for this to be an annual exercise, with reports on hate crime incidents targeting places of worship released every year. In the medium to long-term, therefore, the report will support the identification of trends and patterns in such attacks. Again, by enhancing the evidence base on which policies and interventions are planned, this will help make them more effective.

The remainder of this report comprises definitions used and the research methodology, followed by the findings. These are given by country, by religious community and month of year, by type of incident, and by perpetrator. More detailed results are given for three countries in Europe: Germany, France and Italy. Analysis of the findings is used to come up with a list of recommendations: as well as general recommendations, the report makes some specifically for, one, religious communities and, two, policymakers.



1.4 DEFINITIONS AND METHODOLOGY

This report uses the following definitions for key terms:

- **PLACES OF WORSHIP** – refer to religious sites, monuments, faith specific symbols, or facilities used by faith communities.
- **INCIDENTS** - refer to a wide variety of illegal or legal but damaging and offensive acts (see Box 3) targeting a place of worship or individual in or around a place of worship, whether intentional or unintentional. These can range from terrorist attacks to break-ins, thefts, threats, protests and other types. It is important to note that this report does not look at hate crimes against places of worship, but rather focuses on incidents against religious sites, such as vandalism, theft and assault. This is due to different EU member states having differing definitions of hate crimes, which can lead to variation in recording these.

BOX 3: EXAMPLES OF POSSIBLY LEGAL ACTS TARGETING RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

3

SWEDEN – On 1st May 2022, a far-right individual burned the Quran in front of Uppsala Mosque, Sweden (Europa Press, 2022). While it is unclear whether the burning of Quran by itself is legal or not, it is an offensive act, and is meant to target and provoke a certain religious community.

THE NETHERLANDS – In Spring 2022, during Ramadan, the anti-Islam movement Pegida announced demonstrations in front of mosques in a number of Dutch cities. Local authorities did not allow demonstrations to take place due to fear of unrest (Eindhovens Dagblad, 2022). These demonstrations can be and are offensive but are not banned by law (Van Oordt R., 2022). In 2019, a Pegida demonstration took place in Utrecht. The event resulted in violence, and damage during clashes with the demonstration opponents (Rtlnieuws, 2019).

The report covers the time period June 2021 to May 2022. It is based entirely on secondary sources; no primary research was carried out. The main literature sources were media reports, government agencies (esp. law enforcement agencies) and reports of multilateral bodies, notably the EU, as well as social media.

The main search engine used was Google. A variety of key search terms were used in different combinations, e.g., church vandalism, mosque fire, synagogue theft etc. All 27 countries of the European Union were included in the search; European countries not in the EU, e.g., the United Kingdom, were not examined. The search was performed in 24 languages: German, French, Dutch, Bulgarian, Romanian, Croatian, Greek, Czech, Danish, Estonian, Finnish, Hungarian, English, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Luxembourgish, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish and Swedish. For each incident that was identified, the following information was extracted and coded: date, location, description of incident, religion (denomination), involvement of authorities, and perpetrator/suspect characteristics. The extracted information was analysed using appropriate software.

The methodology for incidents against places of worship in Germany was different because additional data sources, notably government websites, were available for that country. Other EU countries were not as proactive in recording incidents and making this data available through government websites. Hence, the German results cannot be compared with those of the other 26 EU countries, and are therefore presented in a separate section in this report. It is important to note that, while every effort has been made to document all incidents that took place in the study time period, the results given here are still likely to be only a small proportion of the actual total. This is due to the large scale of under-reporting of such incidents, as highlighted above (see FRA, 2021).

BOX 4: PRIEST ATTACKED, AND CHURCH DESECRATED

It was an early Wednesday morning when the Szczecin priest (Poland) was alerted of a man devastating his church. The priest tried to start a discussion with the perpetrator to persuade him to stop. However, the next thing that followed was a violent punch to the right side of the priest's face. The police managed to detain the aggressor, but the priest and his community will have to suffer through the consequences. The priest has a broken jaw and a hematoma which require surgery as a result of the attack. It was supposed to be a day like any other, but it turned into a traumatic event. Now, the Szczecin community have to push through the fear and battle with the numerous questions that torment them day to day following the attack. Their safety is endangered and the place that was supposed to be a refuge has become a target.

Source: (wPolityce, 2021)

2. RESULTS BY COUNTRY

2.1 26 EU Countries (excluding Germany)

The study identified 607 incidents targeting places of worship between June 2021 to May 2022 across 26 European Union countries (excluding Germany). Figure 1 gives the country-wise distribution of these incidents. The highest frequency was seen in France (182 incidents) followed by Italy (102 incidents).

Numbers were far lower in other countries, while no incidents were identified in Luxembourg. As noted earlier in this report, the low figures are more likely to reflect under-reporting, or incidents not being made public by law enforcement or the affected community, rather than low prevalence on ground.

Some of the reasons why incidents are not shared publicly by the affected community are: fear of more attacks targeting the religious site, lack of trust in local authorities or law enforcement, and the dismissal of the incident as minor or with minimal physical damage.

Figure 1: Distribution across 26 EU countries of incidents targeting places of worship

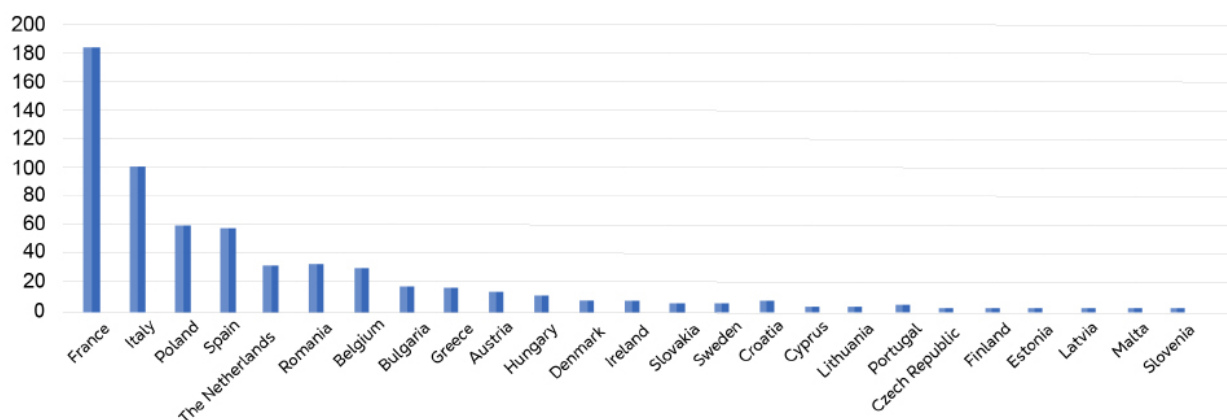


Table 1: Distribution across 26 EU countries of incidents targeting places of worship

COUNTRY	NO. OF INCIDENTS	COUNTRY	NO. OF INCIDENTS
FRANCE	182	SLOVAKIA	6
ITALY	102	SWEDEN	6
POLAND	60	CROATIA	4
SPAIN	57	CYPRUS	4
THE NETHERLANDS	32	LITHUANIA	4
ROMANIA	32	PORTUGAL	4
BELGIUM	30	CZECH REPUBLIC	3
BULGARIA	16	FINLAND	3
GREECE	16	ESTONIA	2
AUSTRIA	14	LATVIA	1
HUNGARY	10	MALTA	1
DENMARK	9	SLOVENIA	1
IRELAND	8	LUXEMBOURG	0

2.2 INCIDENTS IN GERMANY

As noted above, a different methodology was used for identifying incidents targeting places of worship in Germany. Thanks to more proactive reporting of incidents on government websites in Germany compared to other EU countries, a wider pool of sources was available. In particular, Germany has a comprehensive database for press information, Presseportal.de , and this was the primary source of data used in this report. A further difference between Germany and the other 26 EU countries is that the former uses a broader definition of hate crimes, which will have knock-on effects on recording of incidents. This is why results for Germany are not comparable with those of the other 26 EU countries. The study identified 499 incidents against places of worship in Germany in the assessment period.

3. BREAKDOWN OF RESULTS

While country results for Germany and the other 26 EU countries are not comparable because different sources and methodology were used for data collection, the results can be aggregated and analysed on the basis of different traits: time of year, religion, perpetrators, type of incident, etc. This chapter thus provides a breakdown of the data for all 27 EU countries, including Germany, i.e. for the total of 1,106 incidents targeting places of worship.

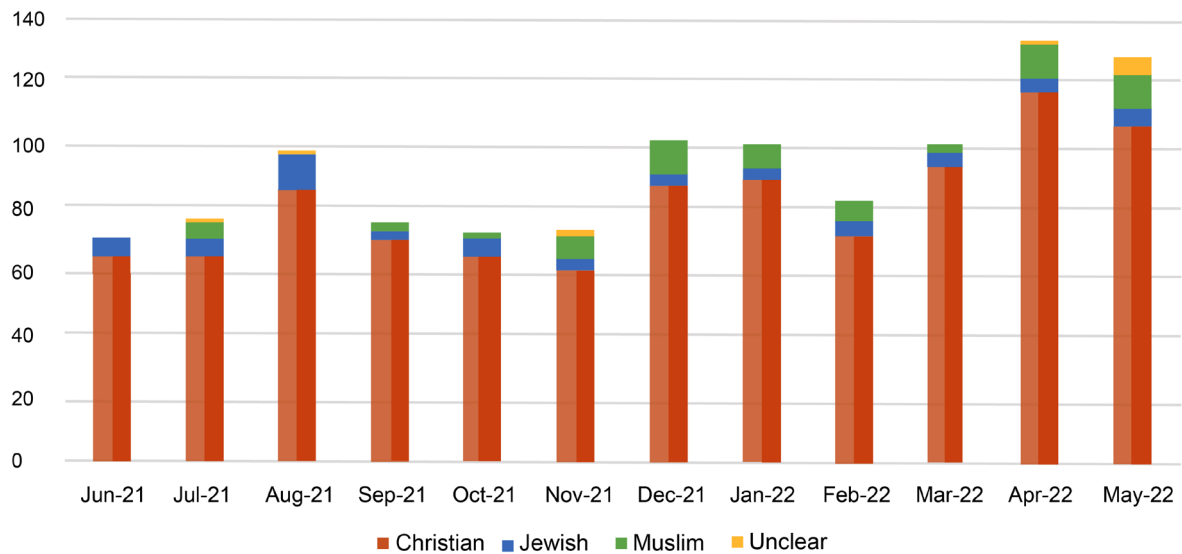


3.1 INCIDENTS BY MONTH AND RELIGION

Figure 2 presents incidents targeting places of worship by month and by religion. It is clear that by far the highest proportion of incidents are directed against Christian places of worship. Of the total 1,106 incidents identified, 965 involved Christian religious sites, followed by 70 Muslim places of worship, and 62 Jewish places of worship. However, as discussed in Section 3.2 below, the intensity of attacks on Christian places is generally far less than those on Muslim and Jewish places. They therefore tend to be treated with less seriousness than attacks on minority communities. But the high numbers mean that, even though in certain cases less intense, such incidents are still a serious problem for Christian communities, and need to be addressed. Furthermore, the high number of incidents on the Christian community compared to other religious communities can be explained by a high number of Christian religious sites in Europe which increases their visibility.

With regard to variation by month, there are clear spikes in incidents in December 2021 and January 2022, which could be explained by the religious and non-religious events that take place during these months, such as Christmas and New Year's celebrations. The spike of attacks during non-religious holidays can in part be explained by a higher consumption of alcohol, drugs, and the increase of financial and emotional stress during such events. However, we should not assume that all incidents that take place during this time of the year do not have an anti-religious character. Rather, the conditions of perpetrating a crime have perhaps become more attractive. The rise in attacks in March 2022, and the very high levels in April and May 2022, could be explained in part by Russia's attack on Ukraine – which prompted incidents targeting (Russian) Orthodox Christian places of worship, as illustrated in the examples below. There is also a rise in incidents on Muslim places of worship in April and May. The April increase, and perhaps the May increase, can be attributed to the vulnerability of Muslim religious sites during religious festivals such as Ramadan. This vulnerability is defined by the increased likelihood of places of worship to be targeted during religious festivals.

Figure 2: Incidents targeting places of worship by month and religious community



BOX 5: EXAMPLES OF ATTACKS ON RUSSIAN ORTHODOX PLACES OF WORSHIP

Germany - 16 March 2022

A Russian Orthodox church in Charlottenburg, Germany, was attacked (BZ, 2022).

France - 11 March 2022

The rector of the Russian Saint-Nicolas Orthodox Cathedral in Nice received death threats, including: 'If you don't return to Russia, you will be murdered' (Ouest France, 2022).

The Netherlands - March 2022

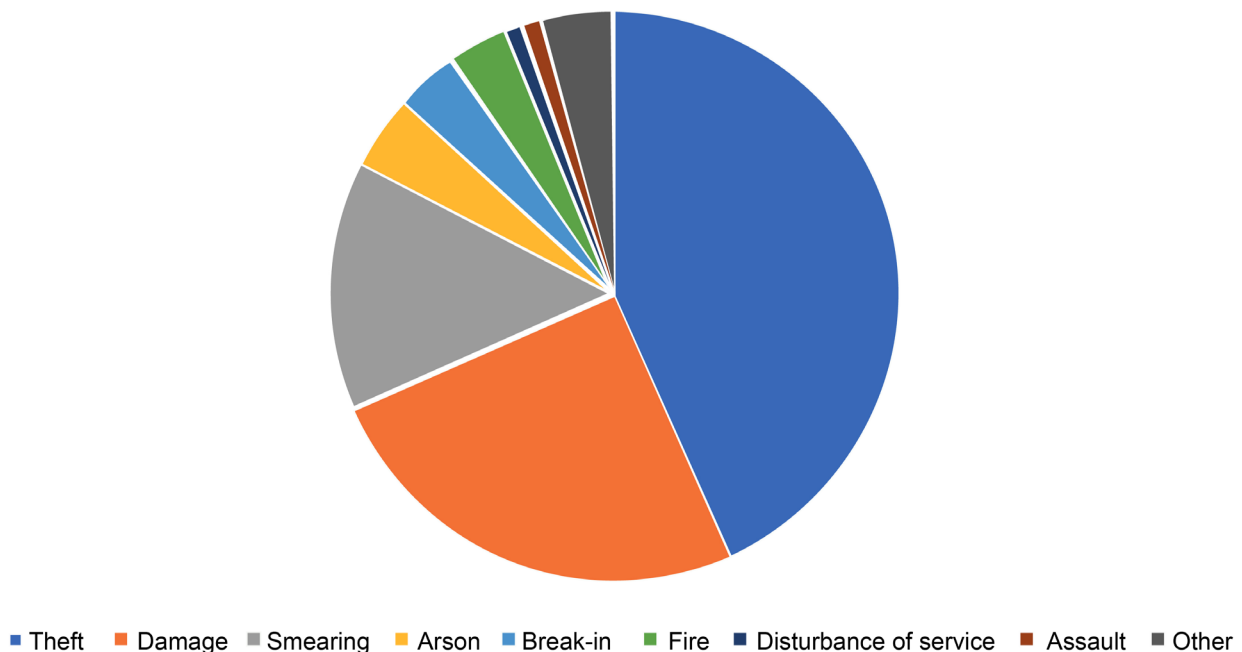
The Orthodox Saint Nicholas of Myra Church in Amsterdam was defaced with the "Z" symbol. The "Z" symbol is a mark of the Russian army and using it indicates support for the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Binnenlands Bestuur, 2022).

3.2 TYPE OF INCIDENT

3.2.1 CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

The most common type of incidents in relation to Christian places of worship were theft, damage, smearing, arson, break-in, fire and disturbance of service (Figure 3). Incidents of theft are not necessarily anti-Christian in nature. In Germany, for example, copper was one of the most commonly stolen objects from Christian places of worship, which suggests the motive was financial gain rather than simply hatred towards the community. This would explain why such attacks are sometimes not treated as hate crimes. However, there is also evidence that in most cases, theft is accompanied by intentional damage. This points to the attacks being driven at least in part by anti-Christian sentiment. Various factors could account for this: dissatisfaction about the way the Catholic church has handled sexual abuse cases; growing polarisation with the conflict in Ukraine (this would apply to attacks on Orthodox Christian places of worship); and opposition to Christianity by radical groups, or by those perceiving the church as connected to the far right. Box 6 gives some examples.

Figure 3: Types of incidents targeting Christian places of worship





BOX 6: EXAMPLES OF ATTACKS ON CHRISTIAN PLACES OF WORSHIP INVOLVING THEFT/PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

France – New Year's Day 2022

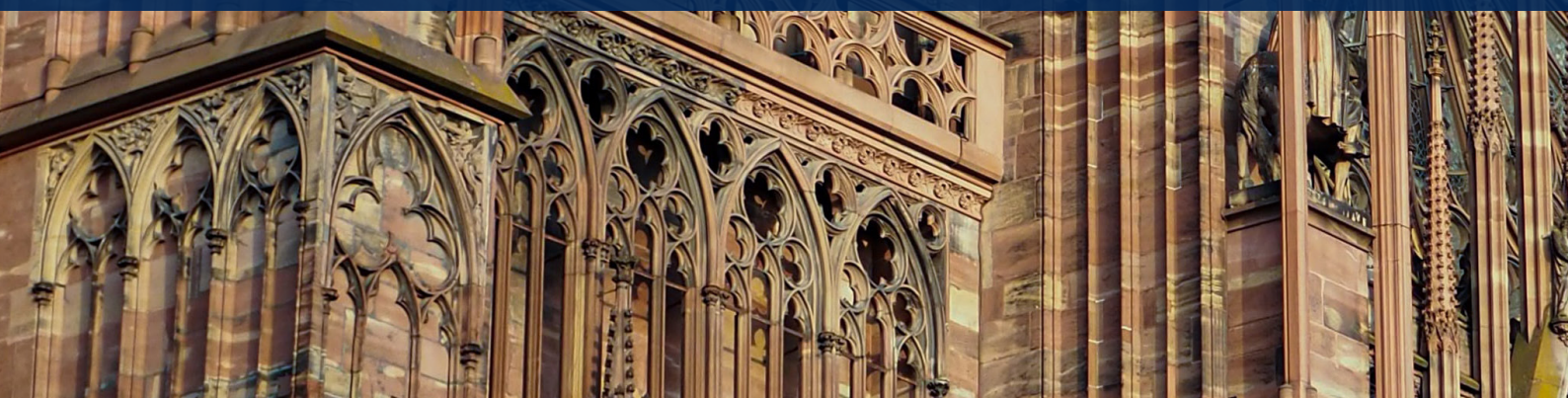
The Saint-Symphorien church in Genouilly became the target of break-in, theft and desecration. While it appears that theft (financial gain) was the main motive behind the attack, the theft itself caused significant damage. The perpetrators forced open two doors, ripped out the trunk of the candles and stole church objects (Le Berry Republicain, 2022).

Belgium - 4 January 2022

The nativity scene on church premises, in Rijkevorsel, Belgium, was targeted by vandals. Several animals showcased at the nativity scene disappeared due to tampering with the enclosure, and one was killed by the vandals. The perpetrators also stole a billboard and damaged Christmas lights and a banner (Nieuwsblad, 2022).

France - April 2022

A violent attack took place in Saint-Pierre d'Arene Church, Nice. A priest was stabbed around 20 times, according to the police, while a nun was hurt trying to stop the attack. The perpetrator is believed to have been mentally unstable (motivated by the French elections), but had no criminal record. The attack had a big impact on the parishioners, who were offered psychological assistance (Kingsley, 2022).



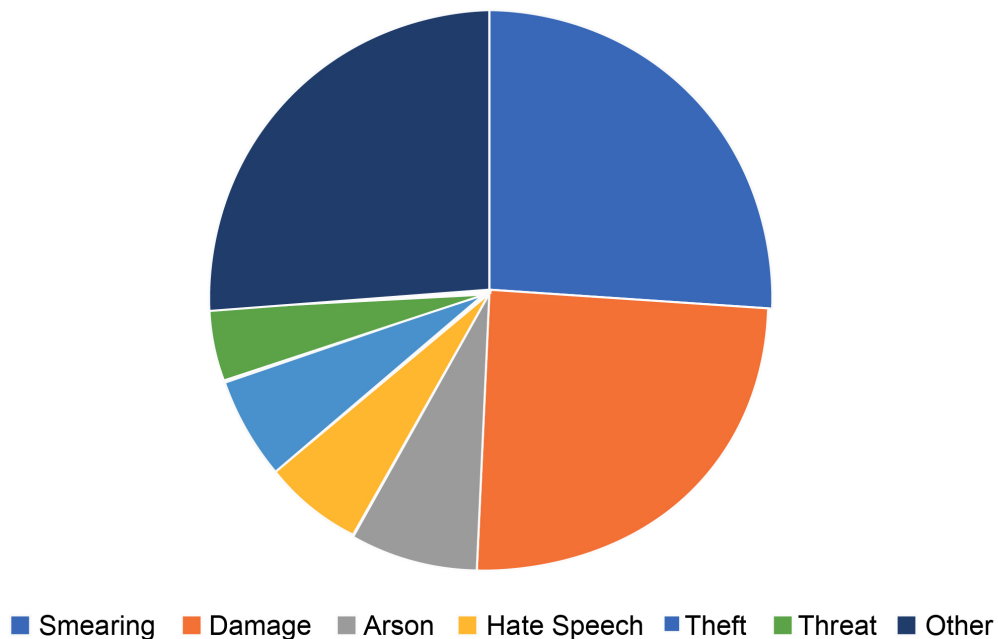




3.2.2 MUSLIM COMMUNITY

The most common type of incidents against Muslim places of worship were smearing, damage, arson, hate speech and theft (Figure 4). Mosques and other Muslim places of worship appear to be targeted mainly because of the religion they represent. The aim of incidents of smearing – the most common type - is to convey disapproval and that Muslims are not welcome, even to spread fear. There is no financial or other 'rational' motive for such actions. Almost as common were incidents of damage. Unlike with Christian places of worship, in the case of Muslim religious sites these acts rarely featured theft. Rather, the damage represented a deliberate attempt to destroy Muslim places of worship, and again convey hostility and aggression. Box 7 gives some examples.

Figure 4: Types of incidents targeting Muslim places of worship





BOX 7: EXAMPLES OF ATTACKS ON MUSLIM PLACES OF WORSHIP

The Netherlands - July 2021

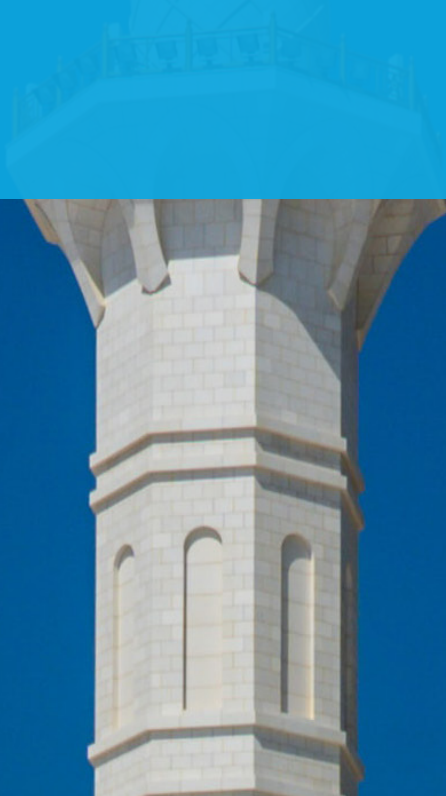
The Hagia Sophia Mosque in Amsterdam, was vandalized in July 2021. The mosque's windows were broken. Unfortunately, this was not the first such incident against the mosque. In December 2020, it was reported that stones were thrown at the windows of the mosque, and the perpetrator made the Nazi salute (NieuwWij, 2021).

France - 2021

A 19-year-old individual was planning an attack in Seine-Maritime against a mosque and a high school for 20 April 2022 (Adolf Hitler's birthday), i.e. it was far right in nature. The plot was foiled by the police, who recovered weapons including knives, hunting weapons and ammunition (Charente Libre, 2021).

Germany - December 2021

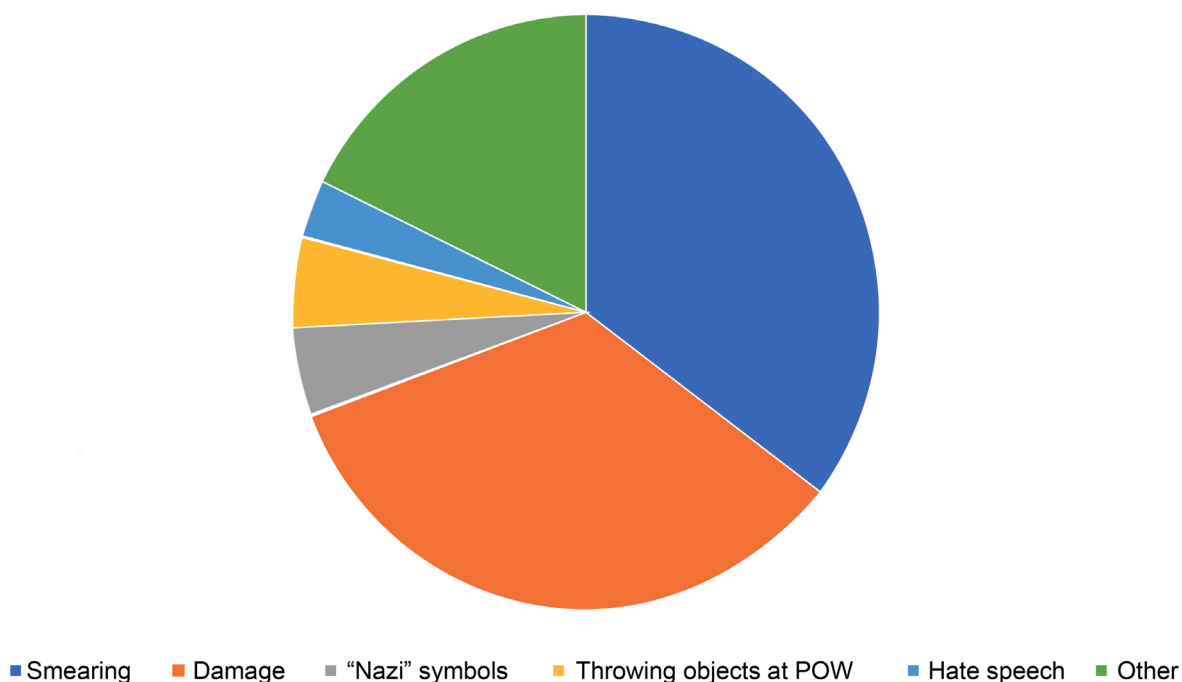
An individual placed a severed pig's head in front of Selimiye Mosque in Dortmund. Muslims consider pigs to be impure and hence the act was highly offensive (Islam IQ, 2021).



3.2.3 JEWISH COMMUNITY

In the case of Jewish places of worship, the most common types of incidents were smearing, damage, “Nazi” symbols, and objects thrown at the synagogues. The motive was predominantly anti-Semitism. In smearing a Jewish place of worship, for example, the message the perpetrators were trying to send was that Jewish people are not welcome and, as with Muslim places of worship, convey threats and instil fear in the Jewish community. Box 9 gives some examples.

Figure 5: Types of incidents targeting Jewish places of worship



BOX 9: EXAMPLES OF ATTACKS ON JEWISH PLACES OF WORSHIP**Germany - August 2021**

It was reported that a synagogue in Berlin was targeted by two men (aged 23 and 24), who threw a bottle against the Jewish place of worship (Juedische Allgemeine, 2021).

Germany - September 2021

Four individuals were arrested in Germany for plotting an attack against a synagogue in Hagen on Yom Kippur. At least one of those involved was as young as 16 years. The attack was believed to have been motivated by Islamist extremism (Euronews, 2021).

Bulgaria - 2021

A message was intercepted of an individual threatening to set fire to a synagogue. The police identified the perpetrator, and a pre-trial proceeding was initiated (Republic of Bulgaria, Ministry of the Interior, 2021).



3.3 REPORTING TO AUTHORITIES

Of the 1,106 incidents identified in this study, 911 incidents were reported to authorities. Given the sources used to obtain this data (press portals of law enforcement agencies), one would expect a high proportion of cases to have been reported. Of the total number of cases reported to the authorities, 169 incidents or 18.5% resulted in the arrest of a suspect. However, much of the information about resolved cases is not publicly available, and hence the proportion of cases resulting in police action could have been much higher.

3.4 PERPETRATORS

3.4.1 NUMBER AND GENDER OF PERPETRATORS

In 224 cases the number of perpetrators/suspects involved was specified by the reporting source. Table 2 gives data on numbers of suspects and cases. As seen, in the large majority of cases (152) for which this data was available, the incident was perpetrated by a single individual. In a further 45 cases the incident was perpetrated by two individuals. Frequency of incidents involving more than two people was far less.

Table 2: Data on numbers of suspects and cases

NUMBER OF PERPETRATORS/SUSPECTS	NUMBER OF CASES
1	152
2	45
3	12
4	8
5	3
6	1
15	2
80	1

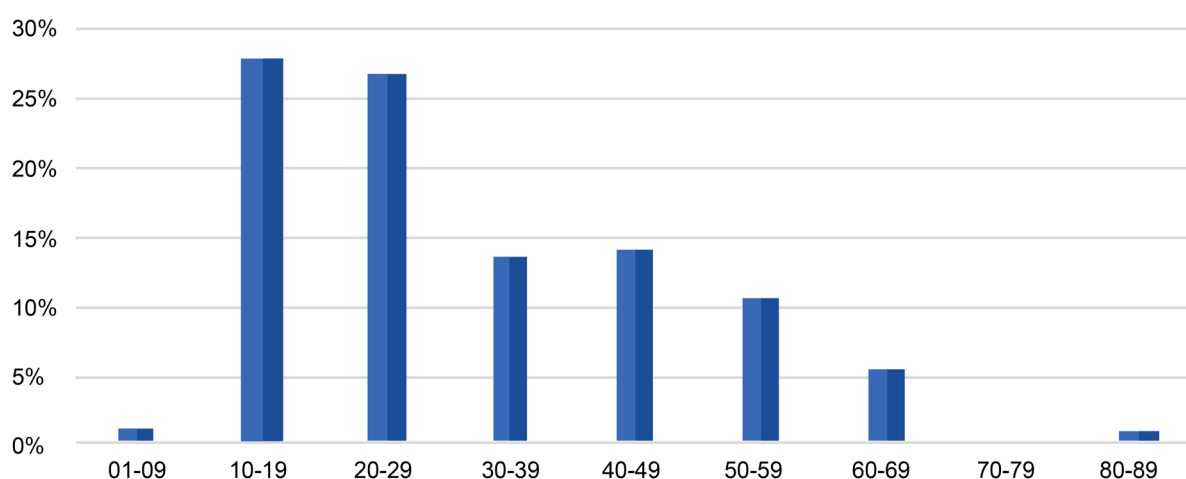
Of the two cases listed above which involved 15 perpetrators, one incident was a riot carried out by 15 boys in the city of Mirandola, Italy which resulted in damage of a church (Il resto del Carlino, 2021). The second incident involved a group of 15 right-wing extremists, who stormed the Pastoral Office of the Diocese of Linz in Austria. They used flyers, banners and a megaphone (ORF OÖ, 2021). The one incident in which 80 people were involved took place in Leipzig, Germany in December 2021. Left-wing radicals threw stones at a mosque and caused damage to the building (MDR, 2021).

With regard to gender of perpetrators, in 173 of the cases for which this data was available, the perpetrators/suspects were identified as male. Only in 13 cases were they female, while five cases involved both male and female suspects/perpetrators.

3.4.2 AGE OF PERPETRATORS

Data on the ages of 194 suspects/perpetrators was available. The biggest proportions fell in the 10-19 years (28%) and 20-29 years (27%) categories, i.e. the majority were teenagers or young adults (Figure 6). However, there were significant proportions of perpetrators in higher age categories, and even 5% aged 60-69 years. Box 10 gives some examples by age of perpetrator.

Figure 6: Age-wise distribution of perpetrators targeting places of worship



BOX 10: EXAMPLES OF INCIDENTS INVOLVING PERPETRATORS OF VARYING AGES

10

Germany - April 2022

Three eight-year-old children were spotted running out of a church in Aalen-Waldhausen. Shortly afterwards, a fire was discovered in the church. Several days prior to this incident, a different fire had been discovered on the premises (Presseportal, 2022).

Germany - November 2021

An accident took place on 3 November 2021 when an 84-year-old man drove his vehicle into a church wall in Hanover. The reason behind the incident was unclear (Presseportal, 2021). Although the incident is more likely an accident, it points the church's physical vulnerability to a possible intentional vehicle attack.

3.5 INDIVIDUAL COUNTRY ANALYSIS AND STATE RESPONSES

The three countries with by far the highest share of incidents against places of worship were Germany, France and Italy. Data on incidents in each of these countries is analysed in more detail here, along with the response of the respective governments and authorities, i.e. measures taken to ensure the protection of religious sites.

3.5.1 GERMANY

As noted in Section 2.2, the study identified 499 incidents in Germany, equivalent to an average of 41 incidents per month. It is important to stress that a different methodology was used for Germany and hence the results cannot be compared to those of the other 26 EU countries. Rather, the higher number of incidents in the country reflects the laudable practice of German law enforcement and local authorities of sharing crime data with the wider public. This points to the need for other EU countries to improve their reporting and recording practices, to obtain a more accurate picture of incidents against places of worship.

Christian places of worship constitute the majority, followed by Jewish and Muslim places of worship (Figure 7). There was some variation in frequency of incidents over the study period, with the most identified in May 2022, followed by January 2022 and December 2021.

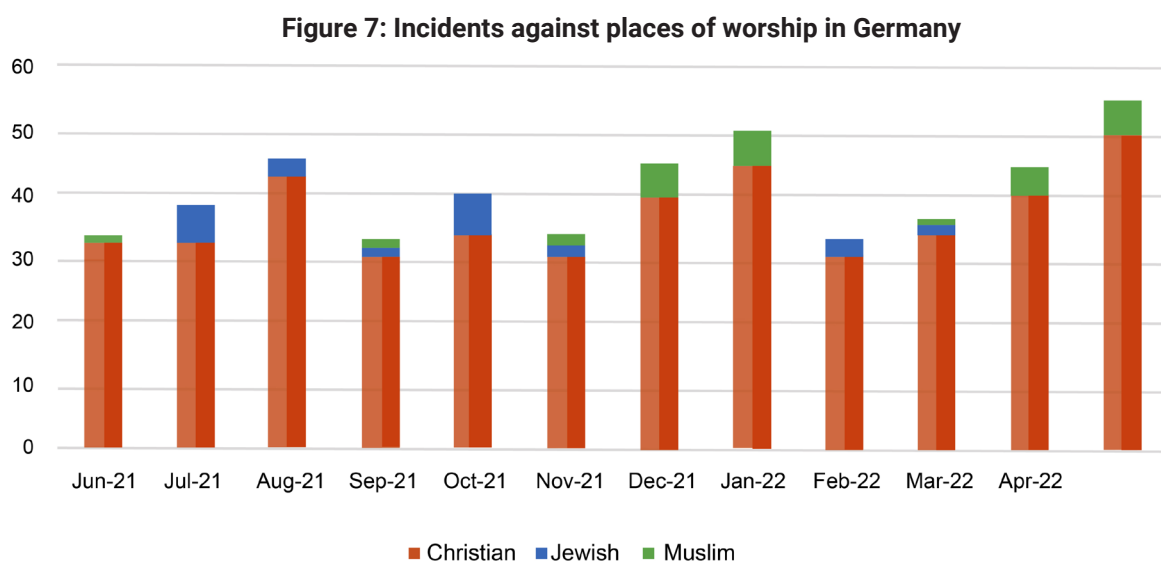
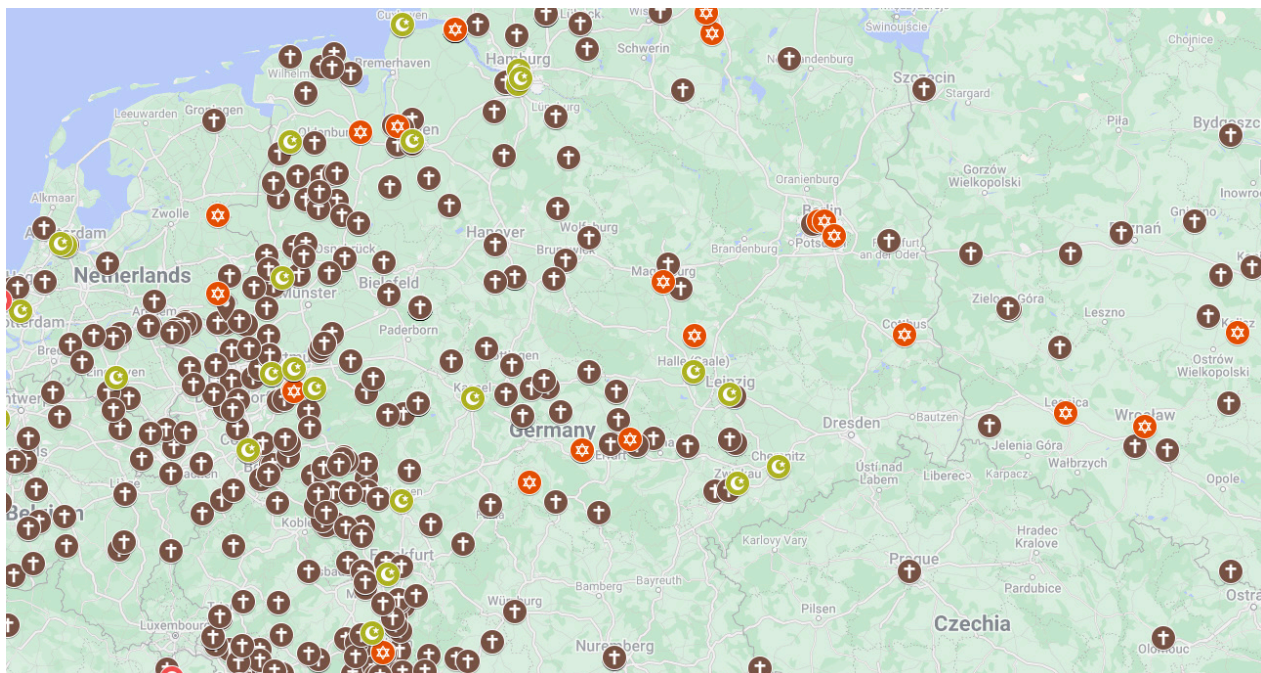


Figure 8 gives the geographic distribution of incidents in Germany. As seen, most incidents took place in West Germany. This could be due to differences in religious belief and practice between East and West. According to the 2018 Eurobarometer, less people in East Germany identify as religious compared to West Germany (BPB, 2020). Hence there could be more hate crimes against places of worship in the West because there are more religious sites/more religious communities there compared to in the East.

Figure 8: Geographic distribution of incidents against places of worship in Germany



Source: Author, using Google My Maps

In response to attacks on Jewish places of worship, in particular the 2019 attack on a synagogue in Halle (The Allgemeiner, 15 July 2021), the German Federal Government signed an agreement to provide the Central Council of Jews in Germany with a one-off grant of 22 million Euros in September 2020 (Bundesministerium des Innern, für Bau und Heimat, n.d.). The latter will use the funds for necessary structural and technical security measures at synagogues and other Jewish institutions in Germany, irrespective of whether these are members of the Central Council (Bundesministerium des Innern, für Bau und Heimat, n.d.).

While this study was unable to find information specifically on the protection of places of worship belonging to other denominations, there are state-based initiatives for strengthening the protection of public spaces (e.g. Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg). In addition, SOAR, under the leadership of EFI, is operating in Germany and providing training and resources for individuals of both majority and minority faiths to strengthen the protection and resilience of their religious sites and communities.

3.5.2 FRANCE

Of the 26 EU countries (excluding Germany), France had the highest number of incidents, 182, equivalent to an average of over 15 incidents per month. Again, Christian places of worship constitute the majority, followed by Jewish and Muslim places of worship (Figure 9). The most incidents were identified in February 2022, followed by December 2021 and January 2022.

Figure 9: Incidents against places of worship in France

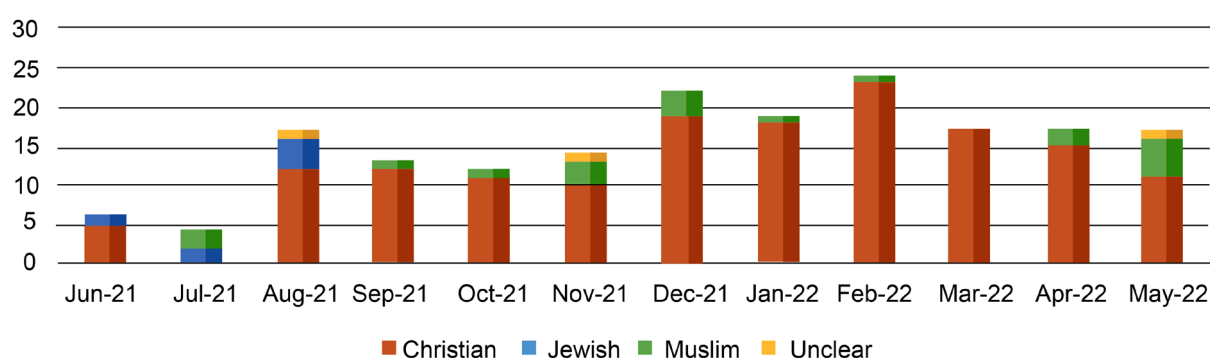
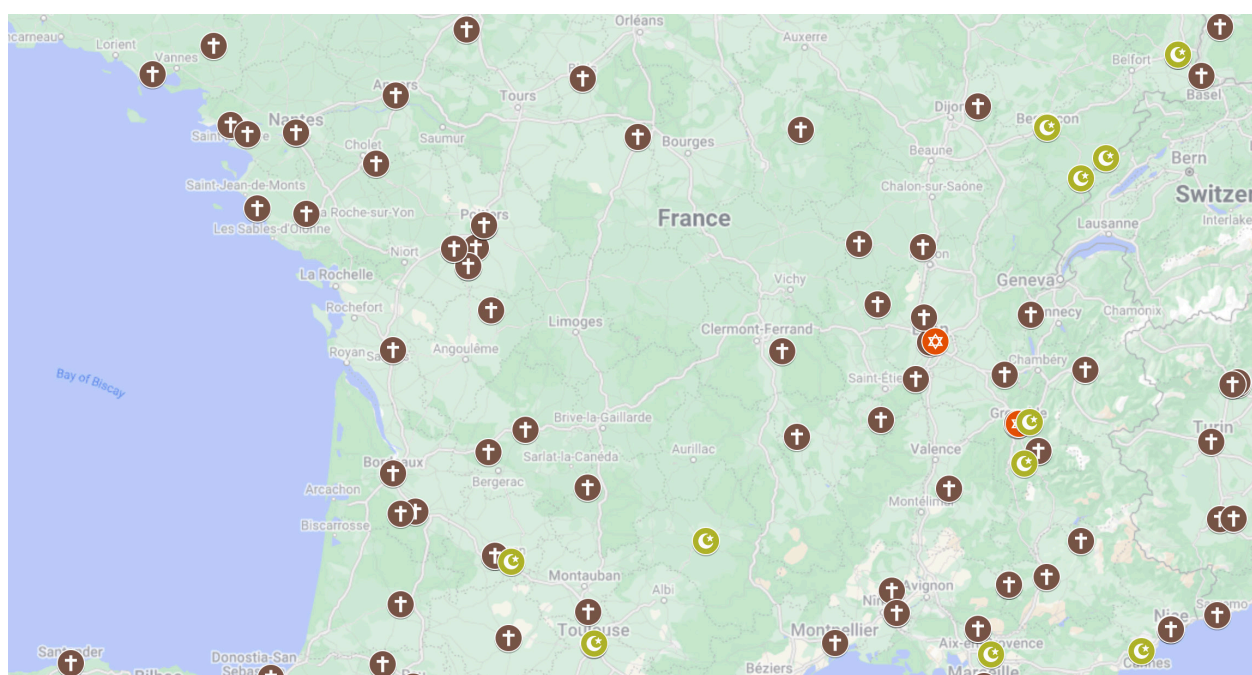


Figure 10 gives the geographic distribution of incidents targeting places of worship in France. It shows a largely even distribution, albeit slightly more concentrated in peripheral than central regions of the country.

Figure 10: Geographic distribution of incidents against places of worship in France



Source: Author, using Google My Maps

The French state is becoming increasingly active in protecting places of worship. Police and gendarmerie are mobilised around religious festivals/events to secure places of worship (Le Figaro, 2021). Similarly, places of worship that are seen as potential targets receive protection from the state. In May 2022, for example, the Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin provided additional police and gendarmerie protection for Jewish institutions following a terrorist threat in mid-April (Huffpost, 2022).

In January 2022, the Minister of the Interior also announced four million Euros for the physical security of places of worship, in particular equipping places of worship with video surveillance (Franceinfo, 2022). Places of worship can also apply for financial assistance for their protection through the Inter-ministerial Fund for the Prevention of Delinquency (FIPD). One of the areas governed by the fund is the security of sensitive sites, that include places of worship (Les services de l'État à La Réunion, 2020).

In addition, since 2015, France has deployed soldiers under 'Operation Sentinelle' to protect sensitive sites, which include places of worship (Actu Strasbourg, 2022). According to the Ministry of Armed Forces (n.d.) "10,000 soldiers (including 3,000 in reserve) are engaged on national territory" under this operation.



3.5.3 ITALY

The study identified 102 incidents in Italy, coming to an average of over eight incidents per month. Unlike in Germany and France where all three major religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam) have been attacked, in Italy virtually all incidents were directed at Christian places of worship. The most incidents were identified in April 2022, followed by May 2022, and March 2022 (Figure 11).

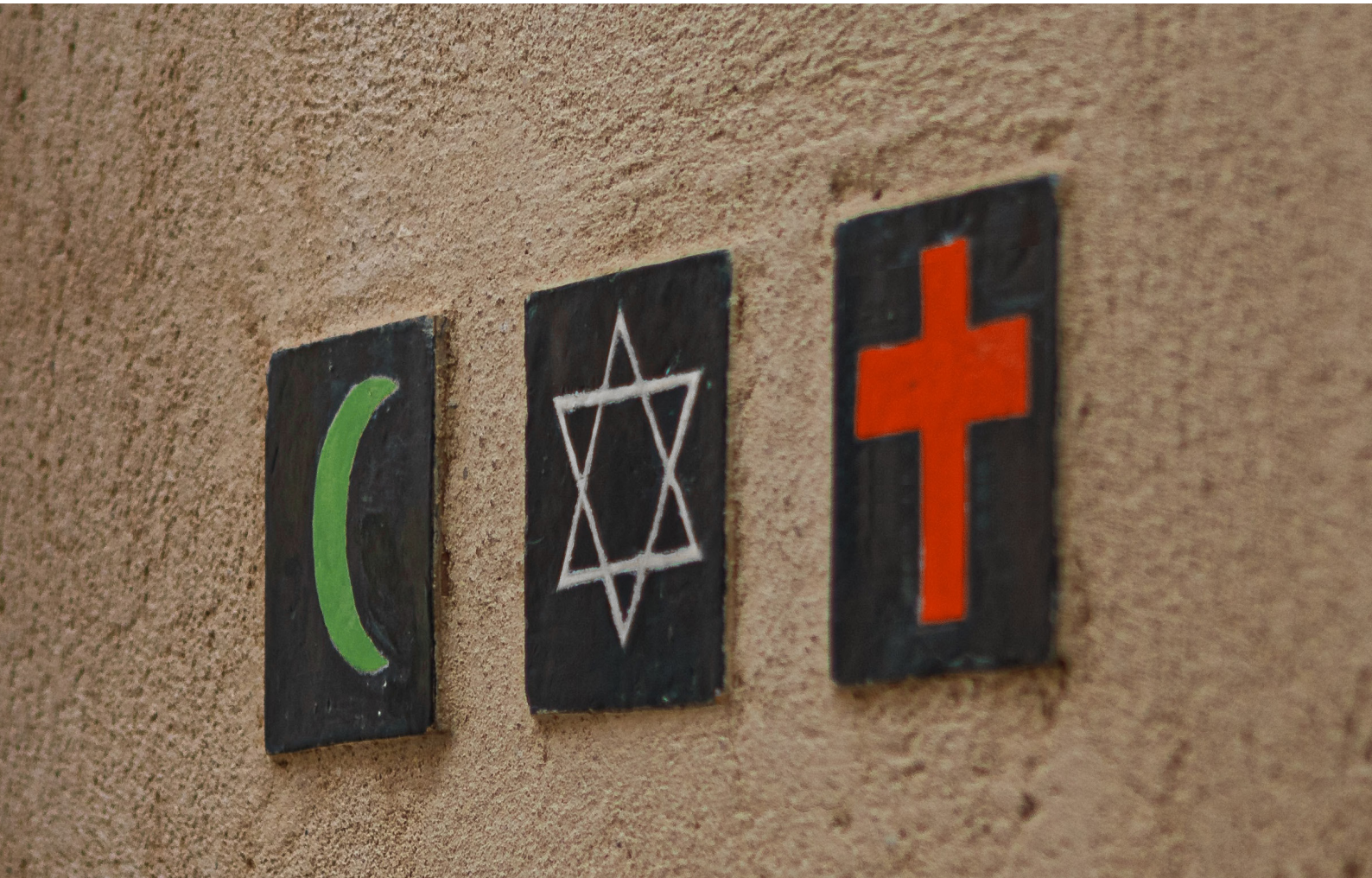
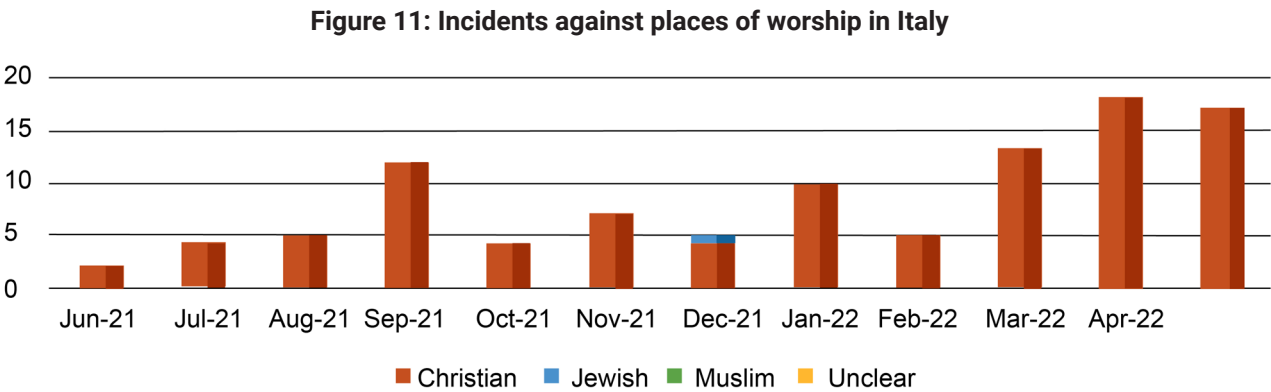
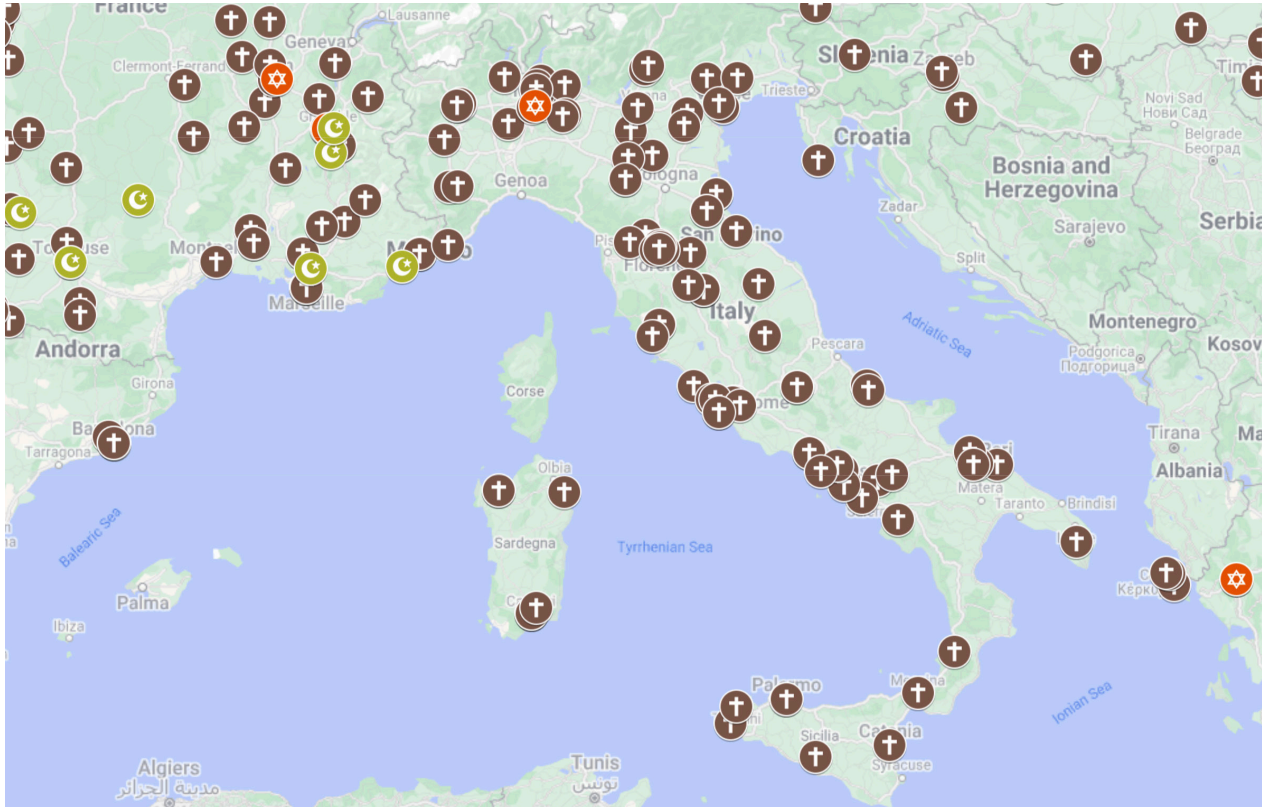


Figure 12 below gives the geographic distribution of incidents targeting places of worship in Italy, showing a slightly higher prevalence in the north of the country.

Figure 12: Geographic distribution of incidents against places of worship in Italy.



Source: Author, using Google My Maps

With regard to measures to protect places of worship, since 2008 the Italian army has been deployed on national territory under 'Operation Strade Sicure', one of the aims of which is to secure sensitive sites. As in the case of France, places of worship and other religious sites are included under the term 'sensitive sites' (see Ministero della Difesa, 2022).



4. ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



4.1 ANALYSIS

A number of points emerge from the study:

- **The study findings clearly show a high prevalence of incidents targeting places of worship in EU countries**, in particular in Germany, France and Italy. Given that there is likely to have been significant under-reporting of incidents, the high levels identified in this report are worrying.
- **The findings also show that, of the three major religious communities in Europe - Christian, Jewish and Muslim - the biggest proportion of incidents are directed against Christian places of worship.** On first reading, this could indicate that there is greatest hostility towards Christians in Europe. However, we also need to look at the type of incidents. While most attacks do target churches, these are mainly incidents of theft, suggesting that the motive is financial gain rather than strong anti-Christian sentiment. By contrast, incidents against Jewish and Muslim places of worship are dominated by damage and smearing – there is no ‘rational’ explanation for this, other than hostility and aggression towards those religious communities. In sum, **while Jewish and Muslim places of worship are less frequently targeted than Christian places, the nature of attacks point to an urgency to action.**
- **The month-by-month findings point to some spikes in incidents.** While more research is needed on the reasons behind the variation in levels seen, it is reasonable to assume that some are tied to the visibility of particular religions at particular times of the year (e.g. Christians around Christmas), and to international political developments (e.g. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine prompting increased attacks against Russian Orthodox churches).
- **A large proportion of the incidents involve perpetrators who are teenagers or young adults.** At the same time, significant proportions of perpetrators/suspects belong to older age groups.

4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.2.1 GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Promote cooperation between religious communities, civil society, local authorities and law enforcement** - The task of combatting attacks (hate crime) on places of worship cannot be undertaken by any one stakeholder group alone, e.g. religious communities themselves, law enforcement, etc. Rather, it requires a holistic approach with interventions carried out by ALL stakeholder groups. Moreover, it requires cooperation between different stakeholder groups to bring about effective collective action.
- **Promote interreligious dialogue** - Interreligious dialogue and cooperation are important for promoting tolerance and peace in society. Specifically in relation to incidents against places of worship, this represents a common challenge for all religious communities. Moreover, some communities will be better equipped to combat this threat than others. By talking to each other, sharing experiences, best practices and lessons, ALL religious communities can end up safer.
- **Follow the UNAOC Action Plan** - *The United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites: In Unity and Solidarity for Safe and Peaceful Worship* provides a set of recommendations for the UN, states, religious leaders, civil society and online providers. These should be implemented by EU Member States.
- **Provide resources for security** – Security measures cost money. It is important to ensure that places of worship are adequately resourced to implement the security measures/provide trainings, etc. that they need. For examples of required resources see the SOAR [website](#) as well as EFI's [website](#). Responsibility for this rests with religious communities themselves but – given that the resources needed will likely exceed their capacity, and that Member States have committed to protect places of worship - also with government.
- **Promote reporting of incidents** - Underreporting of hate crimes, including incidents targeting places of worship, is a serious issue that affects EU member states. As noted, a major driver of this appears to be lack of trust in the police on the part of religious communities. However, other factors such as lack of information about how to report incidents/language barriers could also be involved. It is important to identify what is causing the underreporting and take action to address these. Reporting an incident is the essential first step both for protection and support of victims, and for prosecution and punishment of perpetrators.

4.2.2 RECOMMENDATIONS PRIMARILY FOR RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

- **Conduct risk assessments** - In order to mitigate risks towards a place of worship and its community it is important to periodically conduct risk assessments. Understanding the nature of the problem is the first step towards identifying appropriate solutions and mitigation measures. The risk assessments should be conducted by trained individuals (e.g. law enforcement officers/trained security personnel).
- **Carry out security training for personnel in places of worship** - Security training for personnel in places of worship will help them identify potential risks, measures to mitigate risks (e.g. enhancing physical security around places of worship), and how best to respond if attacks occur. Such training could be delivered by law enforcement agencies and/or other public or private institutions.
- **Carry out security training for faith leaders** - Faith leaders are the representatives of their religion among their communities and wider society, and will play an active role in places of worship. These factors can lead to them becoming targets of hate crime. It is therefore very important to provide them with security training – both in relation to their roles in places of worship, but also in other aspects of their lives. Again, such training could be delivered by law enforcement agencies and/or other public or private institutions.
- **Appoint security officers/advisors for each religious community** - As identified by this study, the types of incidents directed against places of worship vary significantly from one religious community to another. Having dedicated security officers/advisors for each religious community or even each place of worship will therefore help address the specific threats/attacks faced by that community.
- **Implement the Security by Design (SBD) concept** - Security by design (SBD) is a concept in the protection of public spaces that promotes the idea that security is best achieved if addressed from the very beginning of the planning and design of a public space. The concept is being applied to places of worship in EU countries by EFI, through the SOAR programme. While most relevant to 'new' places of worship in the process of being built/established, the SBD concept can also be applied in renovations.

4.2.3 RECOMMENDATIONS PRIMARILY FOR GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND POLICY MAKERS

- ***Include religious communities in the process of policy making*** - Policy-making that directly affects religious communities should be based on extensive consultations with those communities (e.g. through faith leaders, religious organisations). This will both ensure effective design of interventions (based on the on-ground problems being faced by religious communities) AND build ownership among those communities, which is vital for success and sustainability. Such consultations should not be one-off, but rather an ongoing process to obtain feedback from religious communities and modify plans and interventions as needed.
- ***Provide intercultural sensitivity training for law enforcement agencies*** - Law enforcement agencies can themselves be affected by bias and discrimination towards certain groups, including religious groups. To build trust on the part of those communities in the police, and to ensure that such agencies carry out their jobs properly, it is important to address such biases. This can be done through intercultural sensitivity training.
- ***Improve recording of hate crimes*** - Possibly as a result of the above biases within law enforcement agencies, or because of lack of awareness/training, they sometimes fail to identify incidents as hate crimes. According to FRA (2018), “guidance supporting police officers to systematically evidence bias motivation is lacking in many countries”. This is significant, because if hate crimes aren’t recognised and recorded as such (if, for example, they are recorded as simple criminal damage, or theft) the steps needed to combat hate crimes will not be carried out. The solution is to provide clear guidance on what constitutes a hate crime, and train law enforcement personnel so they are fully cognisant with that guidance. Related to this is putting in places systems and procedures to ensure that hate crime data is secured, and that there is no possibility of negative consequences for those reporting incidents/witnesses, etc. Finally anonymised data on hate crimes should be publicly available.



- ***Identify and address the wider issues that cause incidents against places of worship*** - Strengthening the security of places of worship is a necessary step to protect them and the religious communities they serve. However, it is also necessary to address the underlying factors that drive an individual to target a place of worship. These can be very wide-ranging, e.g. exposure to radical ideologies (online or offline), lack of education, unemployment, deprivation, international developments, etc. In many ways, this is thus both the most important recommendation but also the most challenging to carry out. Nonetheless, it is vital and progress can be made, e.g. to curb the spread of hate speech.

4.3 CONCLUSION

The right to free worship is a fundamental right. However, not all are able to enjoy that right. Places of worship in Europe are a frequent target of hate crimes such as vandalism, theft and, sadly, even terrorist attacks. Moreover, as seen in this report, incidents against places of worship are not restricted to any one faith but rather affect all the major religious communities. Yet, this issue is often overlooked. Most incidents remain unreported – in part due to lack of trust in the authorities - or receive minimal attention. The end result is that places of worship are vulnerable to attack.

This report highlights the need for action to protect places of worship in the EU. This will require coordinated action by all stakeholders – in particular, Member States and faith communities themselves. As seen in the description of responses by Germany, France and Italy, European states are beginning to address this issue, albeit largely in the context of urban security and protection of public places in general. Far more is needed: real change will not be achieved until Member States show serious resolve and much greater effort.

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