

ANTISEMITISM IN THE CULTURAL AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

Executive Summary

MIRRA's inaugural report presents the findings from research examining antisemitism and Jewish experiences within Australia's cultural and creative industries (CCIs). It draws from conversations and workshops with 95 participants, including artists, philanthropists, arts industry leaders and representatives from major arts organisations. By capturing impact through in-depth conversations and documented stories from stakeholders across the sector, this unique qualitative study examines lived experiences of antisemitism within the CCIs and fills an important evidence gap beyond survey-based research.

The report reveals significant challenges facing Jewish stakeholders in this sector following the Hamas attacks on Israel of 7 October 2023. While it documents a dramatic shift in the cultural landscape post-7 October, it also acknowledges that some of the issues raised reflect longer-standing structural concerns. The concept of 'ambient antisemitism' is used to better understand issues within the CCI context – referring to a climate marked by anti-Israel hostility that, while not necessarily inherently antisemitic, creates an environment that feels unwelcoming and unsafe for many Jewish stakeholders. It also focuses on impact rather than intent, examining the impacts experienced by stakeholders, regardless of whether behaviour was intended to be antisemitic.

The research also draws on literature and studies examining contemporary antisemitism globally and in Australia, including in the CCIs, to inform its analysis of Jewish experiences in this sector. In addition, relevant national anti-racism and sector-specific frameworks were reviewed to understand how antisemitism is currently recognised in practice. Overall, the report enables a deeper understanding of Jewish perspectives and experiences of antisemitism, including its impacts on Jewish artists, creatives and cultural professionals, and its implications for the CCIs more broadly.

Key Findings

Key findings, derived directly from the lived experiences documented through interviews and workshops, include that Jewish voices are often absent from diversity and inclusion efforts, and that anti-Zionist discourse and online harassment contribute to ambient antisemitism. Many Jewish creatives have withdrawn from former networks or public roles, citing a sense of cultural homelessness. The report calls for stronger sector-wide recognition of antisemitism and clear, consistent strategies to support cultural safety for Jewish communities.

SYSTEMIC EXCLUSION FROM DIVERSITY FRAMEWORKS

The research reveals that despite the cultural sector's stated commitment to diversity and inclusion, Jewish stakeholders feel systematically excluded from prevailing diversity frameworks. This sense of exclusion exists within a broader context of structural inequities, rooted in long-standing patterns of exclusivity along race, class, gender and able-bodiedness, which have not only been experienced by Jewish stakeholders but also acknowledged by non-Jewish cultural leaders as issues that have persisted for years.

Recycled antisemitic narratives regarding perceived proximity to wealth, power and white privilege have contributed to perceptions among many Jewish stakeholders that they are not viewed as deserving of cultural sensitivity and care. Jewish stakeholders report feeling betrayed by a sector they have historically supported and in which they have participated as artists, supporters and audiences, and many expressed that the sector's selective application of anti-discrimination ethics has amplified feelings of exclusion and hostility.

ANTI-ZIONISM AND POST-COLONIAL DISCOURSE

According to research participants, anti-Zionist discourse has become deeply embedded within the sector's post-colonial framework, resonating strongly within arts communities committed to decolonisation. This creates a hostile environment where Jewish stakeholders with diverse views on Israel find themselves collectively demonised. Some interviewees indicated that the timing of these tensions, with the 7 October attack occurring just a week before the Voice to Parliament, created an emotionally charged environment where disappointment with the referendum result was channelled into an intensified focus on Israel. Many Jewish stakeholders feel that, with this shift, they are being held collectively responsible for the Israeli Government's actions, regardless of their political views. The research also identified a connection between the arts and academia, noting that higher education institutions serve as ideological incubators for anti-Zionist or anti-Israel views.

CULTURAL ACTIVISM AND ONLINE HARASSMENT

The research documents how social media platforms have become sites of political mobilisation and harassment within creative communities. Unmoderated digital environments have amplified hatred, and calls for boycotts, doxxing, threats, abuse and harassment have become the norm online. Arts organisations report being overwhelmed by rapidly growing online campaigns that threaten employees, programming and operations, and they often lack the appropriate resources to withstand online harassment. This has led to the withdrawal of funding by Jewish philanthropists, and increasingly blurred lines between artistic expression and political activism, which has created particular challenges for institutions balancing artists' political activism with their duty of care to staff, audiences, board members and funding partners.

JEWISH PHILANTHROPY

A significant finding concerns threats of cultural boycotts against Jewish philanthropic funding in the arts. Antisemitic narratives informed by harmful tropes about Jewish power, influence and control have circulated across creative circles, including instances where Jewish philanthropists were forced to withdraw funding after being targeted by coordinated social media campaigns. This has created a dynamic where some Jewish funders face the difficult choice between withdrawing support and potentially reinforcing antisemitic tropes around Jews wielding financial power for nefarious ends, or remaining engaged despite the hostility. Jewish board members have faced similar challenges, with some resigning or reporting heightened discomfort after being targeted by online harassment campaigns or receiving inadequate support from their organisations.

PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL IMPACTS

The research documents many negative professional and personal impacts on Jewish stakeholders, including career ramifications, cultural safety concerns, identity concealment and psychological distress. It reveals specific instances of hostile workplace and professional interactions, with many stakeholders describing retreating from once-familiar spaces. Some have pivoted entirely to Jewish cultural initiatives, creating tension between desires for safety and maintaining integrated relationships with the broader community.

DEFINITIONAL AUTHORITY

A critical finding concerns who holds authority in defining contemporary antisemitism. Jewish stakeholders report being told by non-Jewish colleagues what does and does not constitute antisemitism. This dismissal of Jewish experiences manifests in various ways, including instances where Jewish stakeholders were expected to justify their understanding of antisemitism to non-Jewish colleagues (educated professionals) in the CCIs.

STRUCTURAL ISSUES IN THE SECTOR

The research identifies how the sector's existing structural challenges, including chronic under-resourcing, reliance on freelance and contract work, and limited organisational capacity, have amplified the impact of antisemitism on Jewish stakeholders. While these conditions have not caused antisemitism, they have created a context in which Jewish independent artists and freelancers are particularly vulnerable to professional exile and a reduction in their ability to sustain their practice and income. The sector's fragmented structure, with complex relationships between governance, operational teams and contracted artists, has also created vulnerabilities and made it difficult for organisations to address harmful behaviour or provide adequate support to Jewish stakeholders when issues arise.

CULTURAL HOMELESSNESS

A significant finding is the feeling of cultural homelessness among Jewish stakeholders, with many expressing a sense of exile from their former networks and spaces. This has led to increased orientation towards Jewish cultural initiatives and community spaces, and anxiety about the creation of insular creative spaces.

IMPACT ON JEWISH CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS

The research reveals how Jewish arts and cultural heritage institutions have been impacted, facing internal pressure from the Jewish community regarding programming choices while grappling with concerns about institutional identity and long-term viability. For Holocaust education organisations, for instance, the current situation has prompted critical reflection about the effectiveness of historical approaches to antisemitism education. Many have shifted to welfare provision and are increasingly called upon to lead anti-antisemitism education efforts. Security has also become a heightened concern for many Jewish cultural organisations.

IMPACT VS. INTENT

Given the harm felt by most participants, the findings and recommendations focus on impact rather than intent, acknowledging that even 'ambient' or indirect antisemitism can have profound psychological effects, including negative impacts on emotional safety and wellbeing, equivalent to more direct experiences.

Recommendations

These evidence-based recommendations combine practical actions with longer-term cultural and policy reform:

- 1. DEMONSTRATE ACCOUNTABLE AND COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP:** Acknowledge past harms and gaps in leadership and frameworks; and rebuild trust through dialogue and collaboration.
- 2. EMBED CULTURAL COMPETENCY IN SECTOR-WIDE RESPONSES TO ANTISEMITISM:** Build trauma-informed, sector-specific responses to antisemitism; train for culturally safe and inclusive creative spaces; and consult on resource development and access.
- 3. STRENGTHEN SECTOR RESILIENCE THROUGH STRATEGIC POLICY REFORM:** Strengthen institutional accountability and governance; revisit cultural safety guidelines; and manage digital platforms.
- 4. CENTRE JEWISH LIVED EXPERIENCE AND DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES:** Elevate Jewish lived experience in sector response; and embrace diversity within Jewish communities.

In conclusion, it's important to note that participants also identified the sector's unique capacity for empathy, dialogue and creative leadership as a foundation for addressing these challenges within the CCIs.