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Mexico City and Buenos Aires, 2022

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a. Preface

The research project behind this report took shape in two separate instances. The first was a dinner in Jerusalem in the home of Menachem Revivi, president of JCC Global, with a group of community figures, including Marcos Metta, a renowned leader of Mexico's Jewish community. At the dinner, Menachem shared with Marcos a study on Jewish identity he had led entitled "Jewish Peoplehood: Change and Challenge." Though Marcos found the text fascinating and insightful, he noted a shortcoming typical of many texts in the Jewish world: the lack of voices and references to Judaism in Latin America.

With the enterprising spirit he is known for, Marcos came up with the idea for a similar study with JCC Global that would explore the situation in Latin America. In his mind, Universidad Hebraica in Mexico City was the right institution for the job. And this was the second instance in which the report took shape.

I remember our meeting in the office of Yehuda Bar Shalom, the university dean at the time, in which Marcos explained the reasons for this research project. Besides providing insight into the many meanings of Jewish peoplehood in Latin America, the study would contribute to improving the practices and politics of community institutions. After an initial work meeting, I spent a month drafting the research project, drawing on my experience in diverse studies on Judaism today, a review of other studies on this topic, and the observations of professors Eliezer Schweid, Sergio Della Pergola, Judit Bokser Liwerant and Paul Mendes-Flihor, among others. The idea was that multiple dimensions to Jewish identity require myriad indicators and perspectives to be adequately captured. Therefore, we opted for a mixed methodology that would include both quantitative aspects (surveys) as well as qualitative ones in order to account for the complex individual and collective fabric of Jewish identity in Latin America.

This study had two fundamental aims. The first was an exploration and analysis of the concept of Jewish peoplehood in Latin America based on the voices of Latin American Jews. The concept of Jewish peoplehood refers to the collective dimension of the Jewish identity and group belonging within Judaism. It includes both Israeli Jews as well as those across the diaspora and allows for a range of religious, cultural and political stances to be integrated into a common denominator. As a fluid concept, it includes the "old-traditional" and the contemporary: it is descriptive while laying out guidelines and it allows for both essentialist and constructivist readings.

The concept of peoplehood began to be used in the 1990s as an alternative to other terms commonly used in discussions of people's lives and community strategies and in academic research. These included terms like "Jewish identity," "Judeity," etc.¹

Judaism is a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be described using isolated indicators. In order to account for the individual and collective dimensions of being Jewish, myriad instruments and variables are needed.

1. See Revivi and Kopelowitz, *Jewish Peoplehood: Change and Challenge*, Academic Studies Press, 2008; Noam Pianko, *Jewish Peoplehood: An American Innovation*, Rutgers University Press, 2015

Our study incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, questionnaires, and focus groups, to offer a broader vision of the phenomenon of Jewish peoplehood and its diverse languages, conceptions, and perceptions in Latin America.

Based on these findings, the second objective was to draft a series of recommendations for community leaders and institutions in order to enrich, revitalize and improve institutional ideas, practices and policies. The ultimate goal is to foster and recreate a dynamic, relevant and appealing Judaism that connects individuals with their identity and collective belonging.

Once academic and institutional support for the project had been obtained, we began working on the methodological and operational framework for the study while putting together the team of professionals.

At that time, the executive director of JCC Global, Smadar Bar-Akiba, mentioned a study on Judaism that the JDC research center was conducting in Europe. It seemed like a model that could work for us as well and after several conversations, we brought JDC Latin America and the JDC International Center for Community Development in as partners for the project. Led by Sergio Widder with his team's support, JDC Latin America proved an active and engaged partner throughout the process.

The institutional committee that provided support and guidance throughout the process was thus comprised of JCC Global, JDC Latin America, the JDC International Center for Community Development, Metta Saade Foundation and Universidad Hebraica.

The research came together in a blended study comprised of two main sections: a survey of Jewish lay leaders in Latin America with quantitative data and a qualitative study involving multiple focus groups. Focus group participants hailed from diverse sectors within the Jewish world in LatAm and also completed a brief survey. That is how this study began coming together.

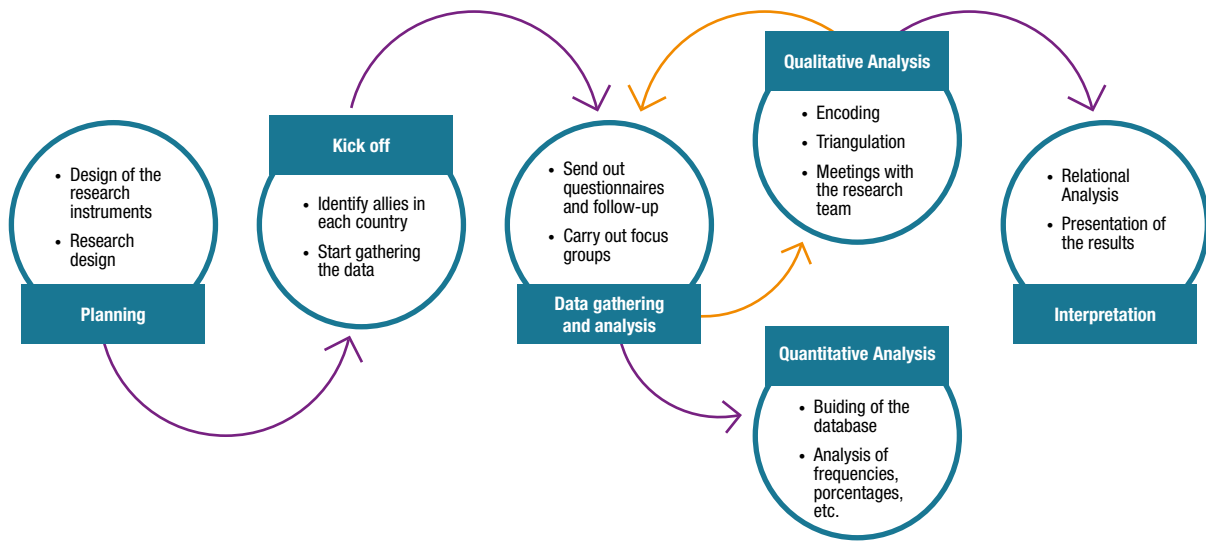
Just as the first focus groups were meeting in Mexico, Argentina and Brazil, the COVID-19 pandemic began, forcing us to postpone our research for nearly six months in order to adapt the study to the new status quo. The advantage to the delay was that it allowed us to incorporate questions related to the impact of COVID-19 on the lives of participants in both the qualitative and quantitative research.

The surveys were done in September and November 2020 and the focus groups finalized in November that same year. In January 2021, we completed the analysis of the leadership survey and in August, the processing of the focus groups.

The study thus draws on rich, varied information from different sources that give us a broad perspective, gathering many voices on Jewish peoplehood in Latin America.

These findings by no means represent all of the positions and perspectives of Latin America Jews, as that would be impossible. However, it does bring together numerous intergenerational voices of those involved in community life in different ways and to varying degrees.

Research process



The report is divided into three sections:

1. The study based on the surveys of community lay leaders in Latin America.
2. The qualitative study based on focus groups comprised a broad spectrum of Latin America's Jewish populations.
3. Recommendations to enhance institutional and community practices.

During the first half of 2023, this preliminary report will be followed by a book providing more details on the methodological and conceptual aspects of the research and the project's diverse components. The book will also incorporate additional studies and contributions by prestigious scholars.

We would like to express our deepest appreciation to all the people and teams who made this project possible:

the institutional committee, which supported, guided and encouraged us to move forward with the project.

Metta Saade Foundation and its president Marcos Metta for their support and engagement.

the academic team, which spent many hours on the planning, design, implementation, compilation and analysis of the materials.

the team that did the editing, text correction and graphic design.

all the participants of both the survey and the focus groups, who generously dedicated their time and shared their life experiences, voices and ideas.

It is our hope that this study will spark a relevant, inclusive conversation between the diverse sectors of Latin American Judaism.

We trust that fruitful dialogue can lead to new ideas, proposals and policies that enrich people's lives and improve community institutions.

Daniel Fainstein

b. Latin American Survey of Jewish Lay Leaders and Community Professionals

Executive Summary

Despite a general sense of pessimism regarding the future of Latin America, the Jewish lay leaders of the region consider their institutions strong and resilient.

This is one of the findings from the Latin American Survey of Jewish Lay Leaders and Community Professionals. The survey was conducted between September and November 2020 by the regional office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) for Latin America, the JDC International Center for Community Development (JDC-ICCD), and Universidad Hebraica Mexico, with support from JCC Global and Metta Saade Foundation.

This survey is part of the **Jewish Peoplehood LatAm** research project, which aims to give an account of the conceptions and perspectives on Jewish peoplehood² in Latin America, using a blended methodology that includes quantitative data and 25 focus groups to provide qualitative insight into the topic.

The survey also revealed a widespread consensus that the crisis brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic represents an opportunity to make changes at the community level. When asked whether the pandemic represents an opportunity "to redesign certain aspects of community life," 92% of those surveyed agreed, while 81% affirmed that the pandemic is an opportunity "to redesign community life as a whole."

A total of 269 participants from 16 Latin American countries took the online survey, which was offered in both Spanish and Portuguese.

The study's aim was to learn what Jewish lay leaders and community professionals thought about the priorities and challenges for Jewish life in the region in the next five to ten years. A second aim was to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on communities and explore internal topics of Jewish community life such as conversion to Judaism, mixed marriages and criteria for belonging to the community.

2. On the concept of Jewish peoplehood, see pages 4 to 6 of the Preface.

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Personal Life and Institutional Development

The Latin American Survey of Jewish Lay Leaders and Community Professionals has explored the impact the pandemic has had on both the personal lives of the people surveyed and on the institutional performance of Jewish organizations to which they belong. In the sphere of personal life, the pandemic's largest impact has been economic: 51% of those surveyed said their financial situation has either worsened (44%) or worsened significantly (7%) since its onset. In this regard, women were hit harder than men, with 60% of women reporting an economic impact versus 47% of men.

One out of four of those surveyed (25%) affirmed that the pandemic has affected their overall health, including their psychological wellbeing, while just 8% reported that their family life had suffered. In fact, 41% of those surveyed said that family life and relationships had improved since the pandemic.

In terms of institutional performance, there were some positive repercussions: the adaptation to online activities and more fluid communications. This finding was validated in the open-ended questions in which people acknowledged the benefits of online/virtual activities but also the importance of adapting to the context, being with others and experiencing a sense of community. Thus, the aspects of the pandemic that people recognized as positive include the "redesign or adaptation of programs and activities to virtual platforms," with 88% of those surveyed assessing this as "suitable" (25%) or "highly suitable" (63%). In terms of "fluid communications maintained with the institution's members/partners," 85% also agreed (36% said "suitable" and 49%, "highly suitable").

The pandemic is also associated with opportunity. Lay leaders and professionals broadly concurred that the crisis sparked by the pandemic can be leveraged to make changes at the community level. When asked whether the pandemic represents an opportunity "to redesign certain aspects of community life", 92% of those surveyed concurred (56% "agreed" and 36% "strongly agreed"), while 81% affirmed that the pandemic represents an opportunity "to redesign community life as a whole" (52% "agreed" and 29% "strongly agreed.")

Priorities

People were asked to choose areas they considered a priority for the next five to ten years from a list of eighteen items. The six that topped the priority ranking were: stronger Jewish education (9.4); support for Jews who need it in their community (9.3); incorporation of young leaders to decision-making bodies (9.0); the fight against Antisemitism (8.9); support for the state of Israel (8.9); and creative strategies to bring Jews with no institutional affiliations into the community (8.9).

Most of these causes— Jewish education and continuity, help for the needy, the fight against Antisemitism and identification with Zionist ideals—are fully aligned with the history and identity of community institutions in the region. However, two other important ones also appear: making room for a new generation of community lay leaders and professionals, on the one hand, and developing strategies to bring Jews not affiliated with community institutions into the fold on the other.

Threats to the Future of Jewish Life

Those surveyed were also asked about what they considered the most serious threats to Jewish life in the region. The greatest threat identified was "political and economic instability in my country," according to 75% of respondents. This was followed by "lack of economic sustainability to provide key community

services" (68%), "lack of engagement in community affairs or activities" (68%), "alienation of Jews from Jewish community life" (66%) and "scant participation of women and youth in community leadership" (65%). The list reveals that Jewish lay leaders and community professionals in Latin America are as concerned about external factors as they are about internal ones. Although the first two threats identified touch upon the region's political and economic volatility, the others refer to internal dynamics within communities. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that although issues perceived as serious threats by Jews other places in the world like "Antisemitism, terrorism, and violence against Jews" are not absent in Latin America, they do not top the ranking.

Identity and Mixed Marriages

Questions related to what defines belonging in Jewish community, non-Orthodox conversions and mixed marriages are all important for Jewish communities in Latin America. The core question at stake here is "who is (or who should be) considered Jewish?" In general, the trend points to a certain level of openness and inclusion, though the differences are notable between the northern and southern countries of Latin America.³ While the countries to the south of the region look more favorably on inclusive policies, this is not so much the case in countries to the north. These differences could be attributed to the Jewish profile that most commonly characterizes lay leaders across the continent since religious belief unquestionably figures into one's response to this question, as well as the size of one's community and the country's ethnic makeup. In fact, along with these regional differences, variations can also be noted in terms of branches of Judaism. In this regard, the position of the Orthodox Jews stands out from the traditionalists, the Masorti/Reform Jews and that of secular Jews, although the position among secular Jews is not necessarily homogeneous.

Most of the respondents were optimistic when asked about how problematic these issues would prove to be in the future for their communities. According to a little over six out of ten of those surveyed (63%), the future will be equally or less problematic than today.

Financial Situation of Jewish Communities and Institutions

When asked about the overall financial situation of their communities and institutions, most respondents deemed it was "difficult but currently manageable." However, Jewish institutions/organizations appear to be enjoying better financial health than the community overall. According to 32% of respondents, the global financial situation of their community is "increasingly harder to manage."

With the exception of Argentina, where 20% of leaders consider the global financial situation of their community to be "healthy/stable," the rest of the region has a more critical assessment: just 1% says the same in north LatAm, and 8% in south LatAm.

In terms of the financial situation for the next five to ten years, the trend appears to be certain optimism in terms of the institution or organization but more cautious when referring to the community as a whole. Therefore, 46% expect the financial situation of their institution to improve in the future, while 32% predict it will worsen. In terms of the financial future of communities, the opinions are more divided: 40% imagine

3. Participants were divided into three subgroups: Argentina (=143), south LatAm (=53) and north LatAm (N=73). South LatAm includes Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay and Cuba, while north LatAm includes Aruba, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, Peru and Venezuela.

it will improve in the next five to ten years (11% significantly, 29% slightly) while 41% think it will worsen (9% significantly, 32% slightly). An additional 19% expect it to continue the same.

Again, Argentina is the most optimistic of countries, as 15% of respondents there expect community finances to improve significantly (compared to 8% in south LatAm and 4% in north LatAm) and 19% anticipate the same for their institution (versus 9% in south LatAm and 6% in north LatAm).

Antisemitism and Safety

Eight out of ten of those surveyed believe they are perfectly safe living openly as a Jew in their city. This represents a substantial majority and a perception shared across the continent. Throughout the survey, there is evidence that Antisemitism is not perceived as one of the region's greatest problems or threats, though approximately one-third of respondents are critical of their government's response to the security needs of Jewish communities. This is particularly the case of Argentina.

In terms of expectations of Antisemitism in the future, there is some degree of pessimism. While 41% of those surveyed believe Antisemitism will remain stable, 39% figure it will rise either a little or considerably.

Emigration

The vast majority of respondents (81%) expect the Jewish population of their country to emigrate, showing that the region continues to be a sending region with high mobility. In fact, 41% of those surveyed said they themselves had considered emigrating in the past five years.

Israel topped the list of destinations (at 51%) followed by the United States (27%). Other countries of Latin America and Spain are also mentioned, though to a much lesser degree. It is noteworthy how the Israel option holds strong in different regions, different age groups and a range of religious groups: from Orthodoxy to the secular, most Jews would choose this destination above others.

Without a doubt, socioeconomic factors are critical in driving the Jewish population to move to another country. The leading reason for emigrating is "socioeconomic context" (85%), followed by "the search for better professional opportunities" (67%) and "not feeling safe in my country" (51%). Other factors figuring into a decision to emigrate, especially Antisemitism, are scarcely mentioned: "the search for a richer Jewish life," was cited by 20%, "not feeling safe as a Jew in my country" by 8% and "due to Antisemitism," by 6%.

Latin America

There is ample consensus on the need to strengthen relations between both people and between communities in Latin America, while respondents affirm that the Jews in the region have valuable experiences and perspectives to share with the rest of the world. However, the respondents note a certain lack of first-hand knowledge about "the realities of other Jewish communities in Latin America" (11%) and "the objectives and programs of the main Jewish organizations of Latin America and their leaders" (7%).

On the other hand, most agreed with the following statement: "I believe it is very important for there to be Jews actively participating in the social and political life of my country."

Moderate Optimism Regarding the Future

When consulted on their vision of the future, respondents indicated a moderate to low level of optimism. The area where they are most hopeful is Judaism in the region: 35% agree or strongly agree that they are optimistic about the future of Judaism in Latin America (17% disagree and the majority, 42%, neither agree nor disagree.) The outlook for their respective countries is not as sunny: 21% agree/strongly agree they are optimistic, while 48% either disagree or strongly disagree with this statement. With regard to the outlook of Latin America as a region, things are even less rosy. Only 18% agreed with the statement "I am optimistic about the future of Latin America," while 38% disagreed.

Israel

The relationship with the state and people of Israel has historically been very important to the Jewish communities of Latin America. The survey revealed strong support for Israel in the region: eight out of ten of those surveyed expressed full support for Israel "independently of how its government behaves." In any case, the majority (75%) agreed "that Jewish communities should offer opportunities for their members to exchange different points of view on Israel and its policies." This could be an acknowledgment of different opinions within the community about the policies of the Israeli government and the need to explore these. This belies a more mature, open relationship to Zionism and Israel.

In general, respondents report a low level of community division in relation to Israel, with 46% expressing that "there is little division over Israel" and another 21%, "there is no division whatsoever." According to 24% of those surveyed, "there is some division, but it is manageable," while 4% report "there are deep divisions over Israel." This contrasts with other Jewish communities in the diaspora in which the topic is a source of more disagreement.

It is interesting to note that one of the statements respondents agreed with the most (94%) was "Israel should actively support the communities of the diaspora." A somewhat novel trend can thus be identified: it would appear that the historical relationship between Israel and the diaspora has shifted. While the belief used to be that the diaspora should actively support Israel, it is the diaspora that now demands support from Israel. While this has held true in Argentina for some time, it represents a novel aspect in the communities of north LatAm.

Internal Differences

The main differences on many topics related to identity like conversion and inclusion can generally be attributed to the different branches: Orthodox Jews tend to have stricter inclusion criteria than the other branches. Differences of this sort can also be seen between Argentina and south LatAm (more open criteria) versus north LatAm (stricter criteria).

Opportunities

The volunteer lay leaders and professionals working at community institutions often fall short in terms of their professional development in areas such as institutional management and a vision for the future. This creates an opportunity for activities and programs that could help them develop and thus make institutions more effective.

About the Respondents

In order to compile a representative sample of respondents, the following were considered "lay leaders," "professionals," or "community leaders": presidents and vice-presidents of local Jewish communities and also federal entities; executive directors and coordinators of Jewish institutions; current and former members of boards of directors; youth directors; rabbis from different denominations or religious branches; principals at Jewish schools and education professionals; and the editors or owners of Jewish papers or other community publications.

The Latin American office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee came up with an initial list of respondents jointly with Mexico's Universidad Hebraica.

The survey was conducted online and was fully transparent: the opinions of the respondents were relayed anonymously and not subject to any form of censorship.

c. The Textures of Jewish Peoplehood

Executive Summary

The purpose of the qualitative study was to gather the diverse voices and opinions of Latin American Jews on Jewish identity and their perception of peoplehood. We were interested in seeing how they express themselves and their main beliefs, behaviors and belongings. The focus group discussions helped us better understand the richness and diversity of the languages, narratives and meanings that participants attribute to the experience of being Jewish.

These groups included representatives from diverse sectors of the Jewish population in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Uruguay and Chile; a group of Israelis living in Mexico; youth from small Latin American communities; and Latin American Jews living in San Diego, California.

The groups were organized with the goal of including volunteer lay leaders, professionals, youth, educators, rabbis from different denominations, intellectuals and adults.

Most of the focus groups were held in person in 2019 and early 2020 and later, via Zoom after the COVID-19 outbreak. We would like to thank all the participants for their collaboration, time and engagement with the project.

Our academic team transcribed and analyzed the data using discourse analysis and qualitative research methods. The categories and ideas that appeared most frequently were identified and then analyzed through a brief quantitative survey administered to the participants.

The questions that served as the basis for the conversations in the focus groups included the following:

1. What are the fundamental elements that define your identity as a Jew?
2. What are your main beliefs and values as a Jew?
3. What are the main daily practices and behaviors that define your Jewish identity?
4. What role has Antisemitism played in shaping your Jewish identity?
5. What role has the Shoah played in shaping your Jewish identity?

6. What role has the state of Israel played in shaping your Jewish identity?
7. How does your Jewish identity related to your identity as a [your nationality, e.g., Mexican] Jew?
8. What are the main challenges and problems the Jewish people face in your community, in the state of Israel and in the global Jewish world?
9. What would you like to maintain, improve or change about community life and the Jewish people?

What defines us as Jews?

According to focus group participants, being Jewish is a combination of both affiliation—that is, origin, what is passed down, genetics (“born to a Jewish mother”), birth—and the choices one makes afterwards.

In the words of one participant,

“I think that part of being Jewish relates to me choosing to live as a Jew (...) It’s being in one place when everyone wants to be somewhere else; it’s celebrating a national holiday in a certain way, because it’s not really that for you; it’s choosing to have children and enroll them in a [Jewish] school, even when there are other good schools near your home. It’s about choosing not to go out on Fridays... I believe that living as a Jew in the diaspora today is a major decision. ”

— Female educator, Brazil

These choices take shape within the family structure, at home and with one’s extended family, and in diverse institutional frameworks like Jewish schools, youth movements, the synagogue and the neighborhood, among others.

There is a true Jewish social milieu that helps build these identities, though it is generally portrayed as a nuanced, individual choice.

What do we believe as Jews?

The discussion surrounding beliefs exceeds traditional religious categories. In the survey conducted before the focus groups, preserving memory of the Shoah and standing with Israel figure more prominently than believing in God or understanding the Torah as a guide to Jewish life.

Traditional-religious aspects are thus combined with modern Jewish discourses.

Among certain participants, Judaism appears as a religious vision of the world guided mainly by God, the Torah and Israel (as the “chosen people” and the “promised land”).

“...I consider myself a religious Jew, somewhat observant and profoundly spiritual: spirituality is the sine qua non of being Jewish”

— Female educator, Argentina

“I believe that, for those who live in galut, the topic of religion, regardless of denomination, is extremely important, because it is perhaps what connects us most to this feeling. In Israel, it is easier to be Jewish: you’re among Jews, the Jewish holidays are celebrated, the culture (...) So for me, today, my Jewish identity is tied to religion...”

— Male educator, Brazil

For many participants, Judaism is mainly manifested as a culture that includes texts, belonging and community, collective memories and a rich intellectual and spiritual legacy.

“For me, religion is no longer so fundamental to feeling Jewish... I think that nowadays, being Jewish is more about culture.”

— Woman from Movimiento Macabeo, Chile

Within this culture, values such as family, resilience and the search for social justice (Tikkun Olam) are mentioned. The search for knowledge is emphasized as a characteristic of Judaism along with pluralism and diversity. Some participants also mention the importance of the Hebrew language.

“...What I value about Judaism is education and open-mindedness. I’ve discovered that there’s a reason, I mean, we’re capable of being different, because we can question our actions, educate ourselves and think differently...”

— Male leader, Argentina

The Jews are perceived as a people with a universal calling, based on their principles and values. The belief in the importance of preserving Holocaust memory and actively supporting the state of Israel are fundamental to this perception, which will be analyzed below.

Israel as a Benchmark for Jewish Identity and Practices

Within beliefs and practices, Israel holds an important place. The overwhelming majority of participants conceive of Israel as an important or even central component to their identity as Jews. With the exception of four people, all of those interviewed had visited or lived in Israel at some point in their lives.

The reasons they give for their connection to Israel are diverse, ranging from family ties to the perception of Israel as a historic-spiritual center and as a point for unity and connection among Jews globally. Israel is also seen as a source of renovation for Jewish life, a laboratory for Jewish practices and values, and a safe place and “Plan B” in case of problems or Antisemitism in the countries where participants live.

“Israel is the center, the core of the Jewish people, the center for Jews but also for the nations. It’s our home and I believe that the hope of getting back to what we once were is what has sustained us as Jews through the present.”

— Female educator, Mexico

“Israel is living Judaism... [...] regardless of the fact that as a Jew I may or may not agree with everyone’s political or religious position... I feel like Israel connects me to Judaism”

— Young man, Brazil

Yet in the view of the study’s participants, this does not diminish the controversy surrounding many Israel-related topics, including Israeli policies toward Palestinians and minorities; internal polarization between the religious and the secular, the “hawks” and the “doves,” and the lurch to the right of Israeli society as viewed by a mainly liberal diaspora. Other issues participants view with concern include the lack of knowledge or interest in Israel about what happens in the diaspora, the conflicts and tensions that Israeli actions spark in the diaspora and the need for Israel to support weaker, smaller communities.

In general, in most of the countries of Latin America, the Jews feel comfortable with their national identity, but they view Israel as a possible destination and a second home.

“...I would say that my house is in Argentina but Israel is my home (...) It’s my second home and if for some reason, I had to leave Argentina, there’s no doubt in my mind that I would go to Israel. But I live in Argentina and I fight for Argentina, for all of us to have a better society, both within the Jewish community and also the community at large, because we are unquestionably part of that world.”

— Woman leader, Argentina

For educators and some other groups, Israel is also part of daily practices: reading Israeli papers and tuning in to Israel media outlets to be informed; as a topic for instruction and learning; as activism and participation in the youth movements; as a cultural, religious and language reference; and as Hasbara (public diplomacy) to defend Israel and Zionism from attacks.

The Memory of the Shoah and Antisemitism

According to the people interviewed, the memory of the Shoah strongly influences their beliefs and values. Yet this memory and its meaning are subject to a wide range of interpretations and connections: family memories and mandates and support for survivors; the intergenerational impact, which involves at least three generations; the Shoah as part of a personal and collective identity, though it does not necessarily define that identity; and the Shoah as a collective trauma that opens up possibilities.

“As the daughter and granddaughter of Holocaust survivors, my connection was strong, but I didn’t understand this right away because when I was a girl, they didn’t say much and I didn’t know much. In trips to the Yad Vashem museum in Israel, or as

part of the Zionist Youth Movement, I started asking my father and my grandmother questions. And that's when I started hearing the stories and I wanted to do things differently so that my children would learn about this early on and hear the stories straight from my grandmother's mouth... "

— **Female educator, Brazil**

"... The Holocaust is a meteorite in the life of the Jewish people because there's a before and an after. There would be something totally different about the Jewish community of Mexico today had it not been for the Holocaust. (...) Antisemitism in Europe is what motivated immigration and at the very least, what shaped this community and all of the communities in Latin America."

— **Male leader, Mexico**

"...the topic of the Holocaust really shakes things up. Because you say, "look, there's a people, and they went through something like this but they are still here. So what do the Jewish people represent? The Jewish people have a secret. This isn't normal, this doesn't happen to other people, getting up and rebuilding after going through something like this." (...) And that's where we have to determine what defines our uniqueness as a people, our connection with Hashem, our ties with our mission: our people have a mission that was handed down on Mount Sinai... "

— **Male rabbi, Argentina**

This powerful sense of memory brings a responsibility to history: "never again," for both the Jews and for all humanity. At the same time, some participants are reticent about taking on the role of victim. The Shoah also appears as a show of resilience.

"The Shoah is irrelevant to my Jewish identity. I don't treat Antisemitism or the Shoah as value. Obviously, they are part of our history, and we must study them, know about them and tell others about them, but in my experience, that's not what it's about. (...) I believe that Jewish identity has to be Mount Sinai. It has to be alive, stay up-to-date and be a revelation in the memory of Auschwitz and the Shoah"

— **Male rabbi, Brazil**

According to some participants, the Shoah is connected to their activities and professional practice as researchers or teachers/professors. From the experience of these individuals, certain aspects of how the Shoah is taught can be problematic. Participants also reflected on the relationship between the Shoah and other instances of genocide and on what (if anything) make the Shoah unique.

"Could it be that we have to be better than others, be more forgiving than others because we were victims of the Shoah? Because it's as if having been victims now enables us to do whatever we want, because it's a savage world. Israel says a lot

about its diplomatic relations through the Yad Vashem. The president of Afghanistan visits [Israel] and the first thing on the agenda is taking him to Yad Vashem so he can hear the story. Why? To justify that we can. It's got nothing to do with the Shoah: we have to be ethical just the same. That's a concerning question in relation to identity"

— Male intellectual, Brazil

Participants consider visiting, preserving and developing "sites of memory" like museums a priority, as well as trips to concentration camps and ghettos like the March of the Living.

"...Personally, I made my decision to become the president of our community after attending the March of the Living. It reminded me just how important community work is..."

— Male leader, Mexico

The Shoah also appears as a connection between the past and future of Jewish life and the state of Israel.

"...one of the offshoots of the Shoah is the founding of the state of Israel, now there's an important element of Jewish religious identity and practice—Am Israel, but not the Shoah itself..."

— Female rabbi, Mexico

Many of the participants see Antisemitism as a global threat but not so much as a major concern in their country. Some have had first-hand experiences of social and symbolic Antisemitism. They note that it is important to stay alert but avoid paranoia.

"...There are three aspects to what Antisemitism and the Shoah have to teach us. The first is to not discriminate ourselves and show that we are a people that do not discriminate. The second is to fight for human rights, not only for Jews but for all humanity: we are all part of Latin America, a region where significant human rights abuses have been committed in recent history. And the third is to include, educate and include, to bring more Jews into the fold, drawing in those far from the community to these fundamental values..."

— Male leader, Argentina

How are identity, belonging and peoplehood perceived and defined?

The survey revealed that belonging to the Jewish people was fundamental to the identity of participants, with 80% saying they fully agreed and 18%, mostly agreed (98% total). When compared with how participants identified with their country of residence, 85% agreed (35% fully and 50% mostly). This reveals that **Jewish identity is primordial, more meaningful than national identities or citizenship.**

This finding can be tied to concerns over political and social instabilities in Latin American countries, thoughts of emigrating that result from these instabilities and the perception among many participants that in certain sectors of society, Jews are seen as “others.” Affiliation with the Jewish community (65%) or community institutions (25%) is also high (90% total). This reveals the importance that participants attribute to institutions in developing and maintaining the Jewish identity.

A Sense of Belonging to a People

In all social sectors, there are participants who express a strong feeling of belonging to the Jewish people, nothing that this is a fundamental element in shaping peoplehood. Among Orthodox rabbis, however, this topic is rarely mentioned; instead, they are more likely to speak of religion as the lynchpin.

Belonging means several things at the same time: it refers to being part of the “global Jewish village,” identifying with certain groups that comprise the “people,” a feeling of familiarity and affinity, an awareness of belonging to a civilization, something transnational and transgenerational, a shifting and dynamic matrix.

“...the belonging we came up with as a people is changing, shifting toward smaller groups and affinities, and susceptible to external groups, albeit to different degrees.”

— Male intellectual, Mexico

“...the Jewish people is a historical brotherhood that transcends nations, generations, races, everything: and what is strongest is that sense of brotherhood.”

— Female intellectual, Mexico

The intellectual and cultural achievements associated with peoplehood inspire emotion and pride, though there are certain aspects of peoplehood that are a source of concern, like how Jews relate to other groups and societies.

“As a scientist, as a man of science, it’s wonderful to ultimately reach a conclusion as to why so many Jews have won the Nobel. (...) Is it in our DNA? I don’t like that, because that [kind of thinking] leads to other things. It can lead to persecution, racism, Antisemitism... I prefer to put it like this: in the end, we really like science. We get along very well with science... There are Jews [who are scientists] everywhere. There’s not many of us but we are very much present in science. Because we are always seeking to interpret things...”

— Educator, Brazil

In terms of how peoplehood develops, institutions are important, as are opportunities for building and expressing this awareness and the state of Israel.

“...and since I’m a practical guy, I say that in order to continue working to ensure the continuity of Judaism right now, two things matter: the kippah and the ball. Why? Because the kippah brings together all the religious institutions and the great work they all do, and the ball brings together Jews who come to the community for socializing and sports, that is, the ball leads them into Judaism...”

— Male leader, Chile

According to the participants, this feeling of peoplehood can generally be integrated with national belonging in Latin American countries without any major conflict. Yet there are important differences in each country related to the how Jews have historically integrated to the country and the current social and political landscape. Argentines, for example, strongly identify with their country and are also comfortable with their multiple identities. Although Jewish identity does not interfere with the participants' sense of national identity in Brazil, more people (albeit a minority) in this country say their national identity is stronger than their Jewish identity. Uruguayan Jews feel comfortable and express gratitude toward their country. In Chile, the Jewish community does not feel strongly integrated; some participants attribute this to the large, hostile Palestinian community there. While Mexican participants express gratitude toward their country and do not mention any conflict, the words they choose give the impression of people looking in from an outsider's perspective. In the case of the Latino Jews in San Diego, these say they feel mainly Jewish and identify strongly with Israel. They do not strongly identify with the United States and feel more comfortable among Latinos. The Israelis living in Mexico are divided as follows: some are secular and feel more Israeli than they do Jewish, while others are more religious and note that living in Mexico has changed them.

What are the practices that define us as Jews?

In Mexico, Argentina and Brazil, nearly one-third of those interviewed defined themselves as "very observant" or "observant," which coincides in general terms with the different branches of Orthodoxy. The other large segment defines itself as traditionalist. In other countries, this group makes up two-thirds of the population. Those who define themselves as "secular" or "scarcely observant" make up 20% of the population in Argentina, Mexico and Brazil, while this percentage is smaller in other countries.

With regard to Jewish behaviors and practices, participants from the focus groups mention two traditional rituals as central to their Jewish identity: circumcision and burial in a Jewish cemetery, with 90% stating they "fully agree" or "mostly agree." These two rituals denote a symbolic incorporation to Jewish life and its epilogue, besides involving fundamental personal and family decisions. These are followed by two related practices: the fight against Antisemitism and Tikkun Olam, where 70% said they "fully agree" and an additional 20%, "mostly agree."

In third place comes sending one's children to a Jewish school, marrying a Jew and observing Shabbat and the high holidays, where 50% "fully agree" and an additional 30%, "mostly agree."

Men are generally more observant than women.

Traditional Jewish practices are related to studying the Torah, life cycle rituals and the high holidays, and with meals as a time of coming together and the types of foods eaten, including kashrut. These practices are conceived of as mitzvot, expressions of Jewish commitment and a way to build an intergenerational identity. Certain symbolic elements of material culture are also included, along with the synagogue and the mezuzot.

"I believe that the study and teaching of the Torah is the most important part of my rituals and ways of being Jewish."

— Male educator, Mexico

"...It's doing things, putting things into practice, plus having faith only in God; it's about doing things that eventually lead us to believe, because believing solely on the basis of faith is not enough for me..."

— **Man, San Diego**

"For some years now, I have taken the Shabbat very seriously. For my family and the guests we invite, Shabbat has become, thank God, a small universe and a fantastic opportunity to ask profound philosophical questions at every level (...) My Jewish identity is basically about contemplating, learning more and teaching others about certain behaviors and the reasoning behind them, and then acting accordingly."

— **Male lay leader, Uruguay**

"I am an atheist, secular Jew, so my daily practice does not involve any rituals or activities that you could call purely Jewish."

— **Female intellectual, Mexico**

Other practices mentioned include sending one's children to Jewish schools, transmitting Jewish identity to younger generations, preserving the framework for family gatherings, pursuing an active connection with Israel, being active in one's community and engaging in public diplomacy (Hasbara).

"Family and community are both really important to me (...) And obviously, being close to family. I think that as a culture and religion, Judaism is very much about family. Families come together at all of the celebrations, there's food and dancing, but it's always together."

— **Woman from Movimiento Macabeo, Chile**

"Talking about Israel over Sunday lunch is like soccer for the Jews: we discuss the elections, something else that's going on, follow the news. Given that these are times of religious assimilation and people aren't talking about religion, Israel is always prodding you, reminding you that as a Jew, you are at a crossroads."

— **Young man, Brazil**

Challenges at the Local, National and Global Level

The challenges referred to by participants can mainly be categorized in two groups. The first are external challenges, i.e., the way in which Jews and Jewish communities relate to their local, national and global surroundings. The other challenges, which are cited more frequently, are internal, some of which are common to both Israelis and communities across the diaspora. These include internal divisions among Jews and the need to improve leadership and adapt institutions to new realities.

The external challenges Israel faces include conflicts with Palestinians, anti-Zionism and negative media depictions, which appear to be on the rise.

Generally, Antisemitism is not a challenge widely cited by the different groups. This is consistent with the survey on leadership, in which fighting Antisemitism was not perceived as one of the top community priorities.

“...nowadays Antisemitism has a new mask, anti-Zionism, but it’s the same, because ultimately it relies on the same arguments. I believe that for the Jewish world at large, the challenge is about finding the right mechanisms to prevent anti-Zionists –especially the ultra-Orthodox—from going out on the street to burn Israeli flags because they’re against Zionism. Because some in the diaspora might believe this doesn’t affect them as Jews. The challenge is for the world to understand that these are not two separate topics: we are all the same and we must come out against any manifestation of this kind.”

— Male leader, Mexico

“Assimilation” is a challenge mentioned by all of the social sectors interviewed. However, there are notable differences with regard to how it is perceived. Assimilation, a term that elicits emotions and values that go beyond description or analysis, has no single definition.

Among community leaders and educators, assimilation is seen as a threat to the continuity of the Jewish people. Several community leaders also mention the drop in the number of Jews, while one Argentine leader talks about assimilation as the “white Holocaust.”

“The question of assimilation should be understood in a broader, more sociological, more anthropological way, not just in terms of religion, though this is also essential. (...) I see many people who study the Talmud but do not have the capacity for discourse and dialogue that should characterize our culture, especially attitude-wise (...) So assimilation is mibayit umichutz, it happens inside and outside the home.”

— Religious man, Brazil

Unlike the other groups mentioned earlier, lay leaders appear to have a more neutral and not so negative focus. In general, they seem to understand assimilation as the result of Jewish values being presented too vaguely, allowing Jews to easily incorporate other values. Some rabbis point out that a lack of interest and ignorance are what keep people away from Jewish communities.

“The word “assimilation” is used frequently, for example, in reference to mixed marriage. For me, that’s a mistake (...) The term assimilate means what it says: becoming similar to others, not having an identity marked by conviction, not have a reason. Mixed marriage is an offshoot, but it is not assimilation itself. Not having an identity is the biggest problem in Judaism today, worldwide... ”

— Female rabbi, Mexico

Among community leaders and educators, assimilation as a challenge to the continuity of the Jewish people is tied to mixed marriage and conversion. Some see mixed marriage as one of the causes of assimilation while others believe that allowing conversion and accepting mixed marriages can help children get a Jewish education. Both intellectuals and youth build another narrative when they discuss integration, one in which the word “assimilation” has no place. Youth mention assimilation as a challenge but reflect on it from another perspective and paradigm. How can assimilation be addressed as a possibility while also opening oneself up to the world?

“...We can start by emphasizing assimilation and Antisemitism and thus lay the groundwork for a small but strong community or we can start talking about inclusion, start talking about diverse proposals for diverse people so that our communities grow, especially in qualitative terms. That’s how I see it.”

— **Male from the youth movement, Argentina**

Participants hailing from small communities mention continuity as a specific challenge due to their demographics, as well as opportunities for participation and institutions.

In terms of challenges faced by the state of Israel that have global repercussions across the Jewish world, participants mentioned attacks on Israel and the country’s negative image; a refusal to recognize problems and an idealistic, non-realistic vision; internal polarization, fundamentally between the religious and the non-religious; concern for democracy in Israel; and the putting into practice (or not) of Jewish values. In Brazil and Chile, the negative image of Israel as a “villain” could also prevent some Jews from approaching the community as they do not want to be identified with a country seen as the oppressor.

These issues, however, do not affect participants’ own personal identification with Israel in cultural, ideological or emotional terms. There is something diametric about the way they relate to Israel: on the one hand, it is an important point of reference for Jewish identity but on the other, it is a source of criticism and controversy.

“...In my point of view, the biggest challenge is the different perspectives of Judaism, the lack of communication and aggression between different groups... all the groups are involved, it’s the secular versus the religious (...) There are many groups and one thing that’s constantly on my mind is how 2,000 years ago, we lost our nation because of infighting.”

— **Female intellectual, Mexico**

Among the internal challenges are tensions between embracing pluralism and worrying about the internal divisions that come with pluralism; another is religion, which is perceived as a great dividing line (religious versus secular Jews). These are seen as cross-cutting challenges for the Jewish people, locally, globally and within the state of Israel. Some mention the need to build channels for communication, respecting difference to keep the community united.

There is a notable difference in terms of how the different groups of participants viewed pluralism: community leaders are more positive about it, talking about diversity as a resource as opposed to a threat, while other social groups focus more on the negative aspects of pluralism (the internal divisions it causes). Another thing the groups in the different countries have in common is the desire for greater unity and dialogue between communities.

“...The first thing I think we need is a willingness to engage in dialogue. Listening is essential. The second is related: it has to do with studying together. (...) One example is the beth midrash (study hall) where a religious person can study alongside a secular person on equal footing, not necessarily to convince one another of anything but with the willingness to listen. Dialogue and education: I believe that at the global and level, and in the state of Israel, that is what matters... There is no conversation about why we are still together. Why do we continue existing as a religion, as a nation?”

— **Female rabbi, Mexico**

“...The first thing about Mexico is this community of communities: it used to be evident with the question of the Sephardic Jews and today, it is very evident with the question of the Haredi, with the ultra-Orthodox and the non-Orthodox, or secular versus more Zionist individuals. All of these sectors are afraid of one another—terrified, in fact. So how do we build these bridges as a community and find paths to communicate with one another?”

— **Male educator, Mexico**

The question of scant youth participation is mentioned by both adults and youth. While the majority of adults who bring up the topic say that youth do not participate in the community, the youth themselves claim there are not enough opportunities for them to get involved in community affairs.

“We need to strengthen youth movements and get children involved in the Tnuot Noar and leadership courses. That brings up another issue to address: the black hole that appears when a young person’s time in the youth movement ends and they begin the university. At that point, they distance themselves from community life and don’t come back until they have kids: during that period in the middle, they miss out on half.”

— **Community leader, Brazil**

All of the sectors interviewed mentioned the need to transform institutions and/or leadership. Lay leaders were more focused on institutions and the need to transform them while the other sectors had more specific criticism and complaints, one of which was the fact that many community leaders stay in power perpetually.

“We need to modify institutional structures as we know them today. (...) Other alternatives for Jewish life and for Jewish institutional structure are being constructed in parallel to the structures we currently have yet we refuse to see this, we don’t want to acknowledge it. So the question is transform or die. And we have to be prepared enough to reform or shut down institutions that are no longer working.”

— **Community leader, Mexico**

Socioeconomic concerns are a category all groups mention except the Latino Jews in San Diego. While community leaders are focused on topics related to institutional sustainability, others talk about inequalities and the impoverishment of community members.

One challenge they perceive as concerning is unawareness of cultural, spiritual, religious and intellectual traditions and contents of Judaism. Some observances and practices are done routinely but without any reflection. There is talk of “banalization,” “intellectual impoverishment,” “apathy” and “Judaism without a Jewish essence” within communities.

Among different groups and countries, the debate is on how to keep Judaism relevant and up-to-date in order to respond to the challenges of today.

In the case of educators and intellectuals, global issues like climate change, poverty, gender equality, sustainability and inequalities are mentioned, begging the question: how can Judaism show that it is capable of a positive response to the challenges humanity faces?

“It will be necessary to work on modernizing Judaism within the synagogue, using, say, technology to show that Judaism is not closed off: Judaism is a way of dealing with the world’s problems...”

— **Male intellectual, Brazil**

“Women’s empowerment (...) We have to try to open up the topic of women’s empowerment, Halakha permitting, but do it, do it and give women freedom, equality and the chance for fulfillment. This has to be done.”

— **Female rabbi, Mexico**

All groups mention the need to maintain unity and solidarity. Young people say they would not change anything about community support since communities help people who need it (financial aid, health issues, etc.)

“I would keep the community united... I am so thankful to the community and I think that is why I am so dedicated to it: because when my father needed support, the community was there for him...”

— **Woman from youth movement, Mexico**

A Lively Discussion

Jewishness is an important, meaningful dimension in the lives of all participants. Though the perspectives and discourse varied—some more simple, others more elaborate—the conversations of the focus groups revealed that Jewishness was fundamental to the way in which participants defined themselves.

Topics that make up the semantic field of Jewish peoplehood sparked lively and even passionate debates among participants. These included personal and collective identity, religion, diverse circles of belonging, ethnicity, Israel, diaspora, collective memory and relationships to internal diversity among Jews and with society at large, among others. Participants appeared to enjoy the opportunity the focus groups provided to express themselves and exchange different points of view on topics relevant to all.

There is a rich discourse among Latin American Jews that draws on multiples sources like family traditions and practices; formal and informal Jewish education; personal, community and professional experience; access to Jewish cultural and spiritual tradition; interactions with the local, national, regional and global context; trips and contacts with Israel; and the memory of the Shoah.

All of this laid the groundwork for a meaningful, multifaceted and broad conceptualization of Jewish peoplehood, as a valuable category to understand beliefs, actions and belongings among the participants.

Preliminary Recommendations

Goals of the Study

"The parties are interested in conducting research with the aim of hearing the opinions and perceptions of Jewish community lay leaders in Latin America **as input for a series of action guidelines on community building in the region...** Besides its scholarly aims, the research will contribute to **improving community policies and the institutional life of Jewish communities in Latin America.** In this regard, the parties will plan different strategies to turn the study's findings into **products with an impact on daily practices** (seminaries, consultancies, documents, etc.). "

UH-JDC Agreement

Right from the beginning, the parties agreed to include a section to reflect on how data and findings could be transformed into policies and actions to improve communities. This brought up numerous questions and considerations, as complex assessments and pragmatic, value-related decisions must be made to move from what is currently available toward the identified aims.

First off, we believe that this study has helped provide a better understanding of Latin American Jews, their doubts and concerns, and the way in which they live and interpret Judaism.

Second, by drawing on the rich qualitative and quantitative information provided in the study, we offer some recommendations that range from the organizational to the personal.

Testimonies

"Here's what I imagine [for the future]: the community will be mainly comprised mainly of the elderly and not many young people, with fewer members and resources. Yet it will be an active and vibrant community that supports its institutions and fills them with life. I hope that diversity continues to serve as a compass for our community, as well as the desire to help others, especially those in need. Respect and acceptance should be guiding values in our lives. The most important objective is to keep our community united. There is strength in unity. "

— Volunteer leader, Venezuela

"I believe that assimilation is one of the most interesting topics to analyze for those of us who aren't dogmatic—the liberals, the non-Orthodox. Judaism always assimilated: it always drew on other cultures, leading to most of our practices and beliefs. We gave things a Jewish format and I think that is what we have to do: we need to take "democracy," for example, and give it a Jewish format; we need to say what's written in the Torah, and put it down on paper. That's something we've always done and I think that is where we are today, in the 21st century: we need to decide what we will and will not assimilate. We can argue later about what the term means but we assimilate, the question is how we can make assimilation Jewish, in order to continue existing, if any of us are interested in keeping the Jews from disappearing."

— Male rabbi, Argentina

"Dialogue and education—at the global level, the local level and in the state of Israel—that's what matters most. Here's something I know, something I have seen, something I have learned from the history of the Jewish people: sometimes Jews don't support one another. They merely walk side by side because the exterior world makes it so, but not necessarily because they want to. There is always a reason not to walk side by side and to go separate ways, and that is a big problem... There is no conversation about why we are still together. Why do we continue existing as a religion, as a nation? If there's no willingness to engage in dialogue, I simply don't see a way forward, so I believe that the first thing we need is a day to talk with those who don't presumably share our values. "

— Male rabbi, Mexico

Recommendations

The results of the surveys and the focus groups provided us with insight and understanding of the perceptions of community leadership and other sectors that represent a meaningful, broad group of Latin American Jews. Though this study is far from a complete account of Judaism in Latin America, we venture to make the following preliminary recommendations. These would be a proactive way to address the priorities, doubts and concerns of the study participants, improving and enriching individual institutions and communities as a whole.

1. Create a Latin American think tank network

A think tank network would respond to a series of priority issues and challenges that impact the community, including **political and economic instability in my country; lack of economic sustainability to provide key community services (68%), lack of engagement in community affairs or activities (68%), alienation of Jews from Jewish community life (66%) and scant participation of women and youth in community leadership; the need for contingency plans; and creative strategies to integrate those with no institutional affiliation to the community (62%).**

In addition, there is a need to strengthen regional exchanges with data and experiences.

There is ample consensus on the need to build relations between both people and between communities in Latin America (regional interactions), while respondents note that Jews in the region have valuable experiences and perspectives to share with the rest of the world.

Drawing on the contributions of existing institutional capacities at the local and global level, we propose starting a think tank network, a center for the study of Jews in Latin America. The aim of this network would be:

- 1. to compile a database of studies by different institutions and investigators.**
- 2. to design, plan and implement studies that explore diverse relevant topics and their impact on community life in order to make recommendations.**
- 3. to create both virtual and in-person opportunities for communities and lay leaders to share experiences, case studies and good practices.**

Examples:

- Situational analysis.
- Specific studies by sector and topics like exogamy, Jewish schools and the drafting of contingency plans, among others.
- Design and implementation of case studies.
- Creative benchmarking strategies: redesign and innovation.

This would create positive synergy within communities and institutions while ensuring that research is leveraged to improve community life.

2. Develop regional leadership programs

Given the perceived need for systematic leadership training programs and the perceived lack of sufficiently effective leadership, **leadership programs targeting different segments should be organized as part of institutional life, capitalizing on the strengths and resources at each institution. These programs should have the highest academic and professional standards to make the most of good practices and examples of local, regional and global leaders.**

Lay Leaders and Community Professionals Who “Strongly Agree” With the Following Statements

	Community leaders	Professionals
Know and understand the community's needs.	33%	29%
Are well informed about Jewish topics.	20%	30%
Have a clear vision on what the Jewish community should look like in the future.	16%	16%
Have political savvy (consensus building, agreements, conflict resolutions).	24%	21%
Have knowledge and skills related to the management of non-profit organizations.	19%	21%
Have finance-related skills.	29%	10%
Are sensitive or open to discussing gender-related topics.	35%	36%

The type of contents these leadership programs should include can be deduced from this chart. Another critical topic is coming up with relevant ideas and current-day interpretations of Judaism that prove attractive to the new generations.

“I believe it’s important for today’s leaders to be open to hearing and learning from other leaders in the region. [...] [It’s] fundamental to learn from successful experiences of communities like our own. We are constantly suffering a talent drain, maybe because the community sphere feels dull, unappealing and too challenging. We need to dazzle people again.”

— **Community professional, Chile**

The support of international organizations is needed to articulate, bring together and fund such a project.

3. Rethink opportunities and frameworks for Jewish education

Given the emphasis on Jewish education, it is important to create opportunities to **rethink and redesign** existing educational frameworks in each community to make them more effective, inclusive and accessible while respecting religious and cultural diversities.

More creativity needs to go into strategies to integrate formal and informal education.

Instead of putting the focus on existing institutions, like Jewish schools and youth movements, it would be important to start with **the diverse existing populations within each community, designing more effective educational experiences at each stage, capitalizing on virtual and in-person resources of the Jewish people globally**. Besides the intelligent use of local resources, this could also include distance learning programs, virtual education, educational trips, regional and global conferences, master teachers and outstanding instructors who can visit and support communities.

At the same time, Jewish educators need better training, more recognition, and better work conditions.

4. Integrate women and youth in community leadership

Given the high priority of this topic in the diverse sectors consulted, it is recommended that institutions make this a key item on their agenda: recruiting, integrating, and training youth and women in decision-making and leadership roles.

This will strengthen the deliberations and perspectives within our institutions, make them more in touch with the people they serve and build a broader vision.

5. Promote and broaden Jewish cultural, artistic and intellectual activities

In our study, it is clear that the majority of Latin American Jews do not rely on traditional Jewish religious categories in their expressions or interpretations. As a concept, peoplehood incorporates traditional religious concepts but interprets them in other ways.

For many, preserving the intellectual and cultural legacy of Judaism is very important as a source of pride and identification with the Jewish people.

These dimensions should be strengthened in community activities promoting **an integral approach** to film, theater, music, dance, literature and other expressions of contemporary Jewish culture.

These activities can also serve as a bridge between Jewish cultures of the diaspora and Israel.

6. Rethink the community structure after COVID

It is important to seize on the opportunity the pandemic provided to build frameworks for study and reflection and redesign several aspects of community and institutional life.

The positive and negative experiences associated with continuing community work during the pandemic can be leveraged to make Jewish life more diverse, with more global synergy, collaborations and an intelligent use of communication technologies.

There is strong consensus on rethinking and redesigning institutions by starting from the present and looking toward the future, as opposed to starting from the past and looking to the present.

Valuable legacies and practices related to preserving and renewing community must be explored and implemented along with new models.

The Jewish world has always relied on a logic like this: an interaction between what it has inherited and what is currently available, between old structures and new realities and conditions.

Specific Proposal

To develop a self-evaluation instrument that the institutions can utilize.

Dimensions to be included: mission and vision, governance and participation, sustainability, scope, IT, and the satisfaction of lay leaders and members, among others.

7. Build opportunities for dialogue and meetings among Jewish communities

Based on the excellent responses from the focus groups and participants' satisfaction with the opportunity to express themselves openly and cordially, we suggest that round tables be organized periodically with specific sectors. These will contribute to a meaningful dialogue that

allows us to better understand the community's diverse perspectives and the challenges it faces, questioning intergroup stereotypes and building broad consensus. As a result, despite growing polarization and rifts among the Jewish people, we will work to preserve the meaning of **Klal Yisrael**.

Specific Proposal

To start an annual colloquium, **Rav Siach Kehillati**, in which diverse community groups are invited to round tables with the sole aim of engaging in dialogue and no need to reach any conclusions or decisions.

To promote **regional colloquiums** to bring together groups like educators, rabbis, lay leaders and youth, among others.

"I believe the biggest challenge is the different perspectives of Judaism, the lack of communication and aggression between the different groups. It's not only between the different religious sectors: all the groups are involved, it's the secular versus the religious (...) And in Mexico, there are secular groups that are highly antagonistic toward the religious groups, and vice-versa."

— Female intellectual, Mexico

8. Create an instance for institutional dialogue with the main Israeli institutions associated with the diaspora (the Jewish Agency for Israel, the World Zionist Organization, etc.) and with other sectors in Israel and Latin America in order to promote knowledge of the diaspora communities within Israel, and vice-versa.

One perception that was mentioned many times by Latin American Jews was that Israel is largely ignorant of Jewish life in the region and, more broadly, in the diaspora.

This weakens the unity of the Jewish people and should be addressed in a range of educational programs that include trips, stays in diverse communities and in Israel, among others.

There is also a sense that Israeli initiatives are dispersed and poorly coordinated.

The goal is for both to understand one another and build a common language.

This could be achieved through annual colloquiums, residencies, exchanges and seminars on specific topics where Jews from different sectors—lay leaders, intellectuals, educators and youth—can chat openly about what we have in common and what makes us different.

The diverse institutions that deal with this topic on some level should work together and set specific goals.

9. Create a task force for the study, support and assistance of small Jewish communities

All of the small communities, however they are defined, cite similar problems, along with a sense of powerlessness attributed to the lack of a “critical mass” and to serious problems they face.

We commend putting together a task force comprised of three or four specialists from different fields within formal and informal education, religious services and organizational development, among others. Coordinated by central institutions in the region and Israel, these groups could do field visits to three or four communities within the region and based on this, come up with a **project pilot plan** with external human resources and funding to supplement the internal resources.

Being Jewish in Latin America: Leadership, Belongings, Practices, Beliefs.

“The Jewish Peoplehood LatAm”

