

Building Tolerance, Understanding  
and Dialogue across Communities

## **Antisemitism Report**

# **ITALY**



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## Executive Summary

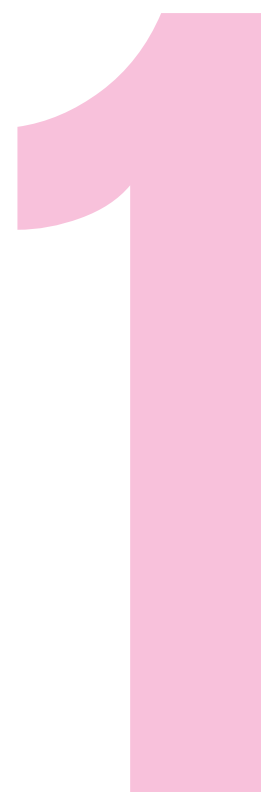
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This document was prepared based on the analysis of materials found through documentary research, in particular on materials and sources made available by the CDEC Foundation and the Union of Italian Jewish Communities (UCEI) portal, and on the analysis of data acquired through the responses of the interviewees intended to provide structured and documented information on the phenomenon of antisemitism in Italy today. In particular, the report focuses on the situation of Italian Jewish communities and Jewish life in its social, political, economic, cultural and religious dimensions.

The most substantial part of the report concerns the level of antisemitism in Italian society, its prevalent forms and the areas in which it manifests itself. With reference to the different manifestations of antisemitism, it's pointed out which stereotypes are present in society and which are the most prevalent. From this analysis, it's clear that the forms and areas in which antisemitism manifests itself differ according to the degree of schooling, cultural formation and socio-economic background of the perpetrators of antisemitic acts. Hence, it is difficult to identify the profile of the antisemite rigidly.

The areas where acts of hatred and hate crimes are most prevalent are social media and sports, particularly soccer. Still, even in the political debate, it is evident that more or less latent forms of antisemitism related to Nazi-fascist ideology are present for far-right movements and anti-Zionism for the extreme left wing.

The report also aims to highlight which other minorities are most discriminated against in Italy and what stereotypes and prejudices associated with them, as well as what are the intersections between antisemitism and other forms of racism and intolerance. Considerable space is, finally, devoted to the educational strategies implemented in schools to counter and prevent antisemitism as the direction of the Italian Ministry of Education and Merit (IMPE) points to the dissemination and implementation of the *Guidelines for Countering Antisemitism* (2019) in public schools and the promotion of a culture of dialogue and peace.



## Introduction

### The BOND project and research

The BOND (Building tOlerance, uNderstanding and Dialogue across communities) project<sup>1</sup> is being implemented between January 2023 and December 2024 in Hungary, Italy, Poland, and Romania. It aims to address the deep-rooted prejudices, hate attitudes and behaviours of society, particularly towards European Jewry. The project also aims to promote understanding, tolerance and dialogue. Special emphasis is put on raising young people's awareness of Judaism and antisemitism and on fostering intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. The research was carried out as one of the first steps of the BOND project. Both the project and the research use the definition of antisemitism adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA).<sup>2</sup> All phases of the research were completed until September 2023, so events after October 7, 2023, and their impact are not included.

The research aimed to provide a comprehensive picture of antisemitism in Italy as a basis for further project activities. The research had limitations: it was conducted within the timeframe and scope defined in the project and along with topics relevant to the further activities of the project.

### Methodology

The elaboration of this report is the result of two kinds of research: desk research and field research. In the desk research, we summarised sources from the past ten years available in Italy on the various topics and sub-topics indicated in the BOND project guidelines. We selected the most accredited and nationally recognised sites, and within these, we identified the most relevant and recent contributions. To complement the desk research, in the field research, we identified the different categories of people and interviewed them in accordance with the project guidelines. The research involved eight individual interviews and four focus group interviews. The individual interviews were conducted with two key experts (specialising in antisemitism and international relations), two FLPs (a sociologist and a Catholic priest), and four community leaders (Islamic community, Orthodox Church, LGBTQ+ community, community of asylum seekers). Focus group interviews were conducted with the following groups: Jewish youth, including four women and six men from Rome; Italian university students, consisting of three women and three men from various Italian cities; members of the Italian Islamic community, comprising eight men from various cities; and upper secondary school teachers, encompassing eight teachers (four women, four men).



# The situation of the Jewish communities in Italy

## General characteristics

Today, the Italian Jews registered in the country's 21 Jewish communities in 2018 were less than 30,000 out of a population of 57 million, half of whom live in Rome and less than 10,000 in Milan. The others are scattered in communities, defined as 'medium' – such as those in Turin, Florence, Trieste, Livorno, and Venice – or 'small'. The various communities are united in the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, which has its headquarters in Rome and represents Jews in relations with the government and public institutions. The Union coordinates the cultural needs of the Jewish Communities and supports the smaller communities. Despite its many problems, Italian Judaism remains alive and vibrant and represents an element of stimulation, reflection and confrontation within the surrounding society.<sup>3</sup>

For a more in-depth overview, it is interesting to note that the focus group conducted with the Union of Young Italian Jews revealed the presence of a strong ethnic, religious, and cultural identity and the desire to preserve it within Italian society, in fact, the Italian identity is perceived as second to Jewish identity. Despite this, there is a tendency among these young people to conceal their identity for various reasons, such as the shame of their Jewish affiliation and the avoidance of the attention and curiosity of others about their origins and their religious and cultural customs.

Another peculiarity of the Italian situation, as highlighted also by community leaders, as evident in the dossier "Ebrei d'Europa"<sup>4</sup> published on the Italian Jewish portal MOKED in May 2022, is the weakness of educational bodies and the complexity and conflictuality of community bodies. Nine out of ten respondents in the dossier mentioned above put at first place the problem of estrangement from community life, which in concrete terms means lack of participation, non-attendance at

synagogues, community centers, community schools, and less interest in the role played by Jewish communities in national politics. This explains why, for the Jewish Italians, more than for other Jewish Europeans, it seems very relevant to improve dialogue and cooperation both at the Jewish community level and between the Jewish community and the Jews who are not inside the Jewish community. It is also important for them to create partnerships with other Jewish institutions, improve communication, and develop awareness-raising strategies for non-members.<sup>5</sup>



## **Social, political, economic, religious and cultural life**

In Italy, even though the Union of Italian Jews and the local community do a lot to combat antisemitism – as the field research revealed – according to a recent survey<sup>6</sup>, Jewish leaders prioritise finding solutions internal to the community. The primary concern of Jewish communities is the loss of the sense of belonging of the affiliates (but not the sense of Jewish identity), i.e. the distance and alienation from community life – as shown by the declining number of members of the Jewish community –, the lack of commitment to community activities, the declining knowledge about Judaism, the lack of renewal on the organisational level, and the lack of effective leadership.<sup>7</sup>

Content analysis of the interviews conducted with academic and professional experts in the field of antisemitism and other forms of intolerance was revealed. The high level of professional, cultural and social integration of the Jewish community into the Italian socio-economic system was highlighted by the fact that the strong ethnic-religious identity prevents a fertile and constructive exchange. The cultural initiatives of Jewish communities are, in fact, scarcely publicised, and they receive just modest attention from a small number of non-Jews.

## Antisemitism in Italy

### Level of antisemitism in society

Research from 2021<sup>8</sup> found that 19% of Italians can be considered antisemitic in terms of primary antisemitism,<sup>9</sup> 35% in terms of secondary antisemitism,<sup>10</sup> and 45% in terms of new antisemitism.<sup>11</sup>

According to research commissioned by Solomon Observatory on Discrimination and conducted by Alessandra Ghisleri's Euromedia Research in 2019,<sup>12</sup> 1.3% of Italians believe that the Holocaust is a legend, 10.5% think that the final figure of the victims (6 million Jews) is actually much less and 49% say Jews are a financial powerhouse. The Annual Report on Antisemitism in Italy 'also shows an important decline with respect to the perception of the prevalence of antisemitism in Italy: whereas in 2021, 55% considered it to be fairly widespread, by January 2023, the percentage had dropped to 42%. It can be assumed that priorities such as COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine have decreased sensitivity to antisemitism'.<sup>13</sup>

A specific trait of the country seems to be "Italian unawareness", which brings a lack of public debate and collective historical reflection on the issue of racism and antisemitism. Not being aware of its own racism (indeed wanting to build a collective image on the idea of openness and tolerance), Italy tends to legitimise and downplay the seriousness of forms of antisemitism and racism, thus contributing to their spread.<sup>14</sup> The average Italian suffers from a chronic form of ignorance due to the reductions<sup>15</sup> regarding their responsibility in spreading antisemitic sentiment in Italy and Europe.

The antisemitism that characterises Italy could be defined as "low-intensity", which, even if it does not give rise to urgent problems, means dealing with a pervasive and creeping phenomenon, and for this very reason, it is more dangerous because

it easily ends up de-rubricated acts of antisemitism and racism for "normal" and harmless "things".<sup>16</sup> Exponents of Italian politics, especially on the right side, think antisemitism is less widespread in Italy than in other European countries".<sup>17</sup>

According to a survey carried out by Solomon Observatory on Discrimination in 2019, 53.5% of Italians believe that antisemitism is not widespread in Italy, and 52.7% believe that anti-Zionism, i.e. the opposition to the State of Israel, is little or not widespread. However, the opinion of the experts in this field is that antisemitism is on the rise, even though the semantic space of the term is very wide and ranges from the expression of prejudices, stereotypes, and opinions to more or less serious concrete actions.<sup>18</sup>

The interviews with academic experts showed that antisemitism is different from other forms of discrimination, as it's also evident from the data collected through desk research, because the Jewish minority, unlike other minorities, is not excluded because it is considered weak, but based on its presumed superiority as politically and economically powerful. Interviews with leaders of ethnic and religious minorities and leaders of minority communities such as LGBTQ+ and political refugees revealed the absence of their direct experience of antisemitic acts; these people have never witnessed any episodes of antisemitism.

The Union of Young Italian Jews highlighted the need to distinguish contemporary antisemitism, as a feeling of aversion

towards the Jewish people, from antisemitism of Nazi-fascist origin. The former appears more insidious and dangerous today as it includes antisemites who despise Jews because of their alleged socio-economic power and because they are critical of Israel.

The field research showed that young Italians know how to define antisemitism by identifying its historical reasons; they are able to recognise the main stereotypes linked to the Jewish people (e.g. deicide, usury, economic power). They have the awareness that in many people, there are latent antisemitic feelings and attitudes that act at a subconscious level as a cultural heritage and that, in most cases, are not explicitly connoted at an ideological-political level. These attitudes leak out mainly in the language of football supporters, in the language of young people with lower-middle-class culture, in the presence of peers or more on social networks because they can do it anonymously.

## Profile of antisemites

Today's antisemitism is related to economic, sociocultural, psychological, political and religious variables, i.e. the profile of antisemitism is not unique and, therefore, not easy to trace. The elements often combined in antisemitic statements are social frustration due to economic hardship that leads to feelings of anger and resentment, information and media bewilderment, ignorance, aversion to Israel, racism, populism, conspiracy, and religious hatred. Moreover, while one agrees with the idea of antisemitism linked to right-wing populism, it's equally evident that there is antisemitism also linked to the fringes of the extreme left, as explained in the next section of this report.<sup>19</sup>

The obvious fact that emerged from both the individual interviews and the focus groups is the idea that the profile of the antisemites, in any case, is generally associated with the male gender and adulthood, as well as with political connotations of two different types, that are linked to extreme right-

wing parties, which have inherited the antisemitic and racist prejudice of totalitarian regimes, and that linked to extreme left-wing parties, which connotes itself as antisemitic on the basis of criticism of the policy adopted by the state of Israel with regard to the Palestinian question.

## Most prevalent forms of antisemitism

The most widespread form of antisemitism is the conspiracy theory that uses the social media channel; as per "Today, antisemitism passes through conspiracy theories of which the internet is full. Conspiracy theories are all reducible to antisemitism, more or less, and to the matrix of the Protocols of the Elder Saviours of Zion. And so there is really a clear and obvious matrix there, which is a form of antisemitism."<sup>20</sup>

The most archaic form of antisemitism is linked to Nazi-fascist ideology in which ethnic, religious, and conspiratorial elements are mixed. This type of antisemitism persists in some fanatical individuals who profess to belong to extreme right-wing political movements that expressly refer to fascism, such as Lega, Fratelli d'Italia, Ordine Nuovo and Casa Pound.<sup>21</sup> The form of antisemitism centered on Israel, on the other hand, is anti-Israel bias, i.e. the aversion to the Jewish state, regarded as the root of all evil, or a country that, as a historical ally of the USA, is held responsible for the devastating geopolitical dynamics in the Middle East. Some people in Italy think that antisemitism as anti-Israel bias is a left-wing identity trait and that this can be significantly fueled by the Muslim minority in Italian cities and sympathetic to the Palestinian cause.<sup>22</sup> Another form of antisemitism, less mentioned, is Holocaust denialism and distortion. This issue is at the heart of the efforts of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA).<sup>23</sup>, the intergovernmental organisation founded in 1998 that unites governments and experts to strengthen, promote and disseminate Holocaust education. According to the IHRA, the goals of denialism are often the rehabilitation of overt antisemitism.



## Antisemitic stereotypes and prejudices present in society

Antisemitism is an ancient, heterogeneous and persistent phenomenon as it's underpinned by a series of stereotypes and prejudices that are present in civil society across the board. Antisemitism is nurtured on a psychological level by the reduction of the real Jew to the imaginary one in which the Jew subsumes certain characteristics and alleged goals. Then there is the emotional dimension of those who experience the economic crisis, uncertainty, the fragility of the systems of representation, and globalisation as a threat to identity, all of which contribute to antisemitic urges. The most important factors are those historically and socially rooted prejudices and stereotypes that produce distrust of diversity and widespread conspiracy thinking. Studies show that both Christianity and Islam have embedded antisemitic prejudice in their cultural and religious memories and have been important in the dissemination of antisemitism around the world. According to the most accepted historical perspective, in fact, the roots of antisemitism can be traced back to the ancient anti-Judaism of the Catholic matrix, which persists in certain stereotypes and prejudices, such as that of deicide (Jews killed Jesus), Jews are conspirators, or Jews are the carriers of evil.<sup>24</sup>

The DOSSIER/Antisemitism<sup>25</sup> published on Pagine Ebraiche in January 2022 shows that among the most shared prejudices in the Italian population that contribute to resentment and hatred are the wealth and economic power of Jews, membership of financial and cultural lobbies and strong social cohesion. The figure of the Jew is classified as a figure of power, and this does not happen to any other discriminated race or minority in Italy. The adjectives associated with the Jew are 'different' and 'dangerous' because they are morally perverse: greedy, individualistic, selfish, ready to exploit the weakest, scheming and treacherous. In addition, Jews are often seen as a distinct and separate

group from the rest of society, very cohesive and inaccessible, almost a sect convinced it possesses the truth, and this arouses mistrust and antipathy.

According to research conducted by Euromedia Research,<sup>26</sup> the most common clichés are in percentage order:

1. Jews have too much power in the international financial-economic world
  2. Jews think they are superior to others
  3. Jews do not care what happens to others but only what happens to themselves
  4. Jews are much more loyal to Israel than to Italy
  5. Palestinians are victims of genocide by Jews
  6. Jews still talk too much about what happened during the Holocaust.
- **Antisemitic conspiracy theories and antisemitism linked to the Coronavirus**

Current antisemitism, by consensus, travels with conspiracy, which has been reinvigorated by the economic crisis of the last decade and then by the pandemic. In a phase like this, the stylistic features of historical anti-Jewish propaganda may come to the fore again. Indeed, it seems that antisemitism is always ready to re-emerge in certain crucial periods, such as the economic crisis or the recent pandemic. The old lies have been joined by "new antisemitic myths and conspiracy theories that blame Jews for the pandemic", as denounced by the European Agency's report,<sup>27</sup> a document that notes an increase in antisemitic incidents in EU member states even if, as far as Italy is concerned. In Europe, the COVID-19 pandemic 'revived' antisemitic rhetoric and gave rise to 'new myths and conspiracy theories blaming Jews' for the current health crisis. This has resulted in an increase in "incidents" against people of the Jewish

religion in several EU countries in 2020. Even in Italy, which recorded 101 incidents of antisemitism, the highest number recorded in the last ten years. This is what emerges from a study by FRA, the European Agency for Fundamental Rights.<sup>28</sup>

#### • Antisemitism in the sporting sphere

Antisemitism in the world of sports, especially football is not only a phenomenon in Italy but in many countries around the world, especially in Europe, particularly in Belgium, England and Germany. During 2022, numerous antisemitic incidents occurred in these countries. Even in Italian football, the phenomenon is widespread in some supporters' clubs.<sup>29</sup> One example is the Lazio-Roma derby, held in the Italian capital on Sunday, 19 March 2023, where a Lazio<sup>30</sup> ultras of German origin entered the stand of the Olympic Stadium wearing a shirt glorifying and praising Adolf Hitler. Antisemitic chants are a 30-year problem of the Lazio supporters, according to the team itself, but this time, the ethical code against antisemitic discrimination has been applied, which is a turning point in the history of Italian football. Despite the fact that fines and revocations do not have the intended effect of removing antisemitism from the stadiums, many countries have realised that to eradicate this behaviour, a re-education of the perpetrators is needed to make them understand the seriousness of these acts. The publication "Combating Antisemitism in Sport" is based on these values of re-education and cooperation, creating an international network that brings these activities together with the view that sport can be a useful means of promoting peace, tolerance and respect for human rights.<sup>31</sup>

#### • Antisemitic hate speech and hate crimes

The Annual Report on Antisemitism in Italy for the year 2022<sup>32</sup> shows that the Antisemitism Observatory of the CDEC Foundation received 327 reports, 241 of which were classified as acts against Jews: "The data for 2022 show an increase compared to 2021 (226 episodes). 164 relate to antisemitism on the Internet, while 77 concern

incidents that occurred physically, including two assaults, ten cases of threats and a serious act of vandalism against the synagogue in Trieste".<sup>33</sup> The danger of the web as a place for disseminating hatred and antisemitism is now well established, also because the speed of the web leaves no space for ethical reflection. With the web, the space for the expression of antisemitism and the visibility of antisemitic feelings have grown enormously because people with the same ideology can easily come into contact through specific social media algorithms, which makes the transition from the virtual to the real and thus the possibility of impact on real life more dangerous. The internet provides antisemites of all kinds with a means to spread their narrative either through explicit hate speech or coded manifestations in implicit or indirect speech.<sup>34</sup> According to the dossier "When the Poison is Social", the net favours antisemitism because of three phenomena: anonymity, the speed of the tool with which one can spread one's thoughts, and the consensus one receives that one is right. Therefore, there is a clear need for legal and criminal measures to discourage hate speech, antisemitic speech and actions.<sup>35</sup>

#### • Antisemitism on the political level

Research has shown that there are two types of political narratives: that of the xenophobic extreme right-wing parties in Europe, which to a marginal extent is also present in Italy (the two main openly neo-fascist groups still present in Italy are Casapound and Forza Nuova), and that of the extreme left-wing parties (in particular some members of the Democratic Party), which are critical of the policy of the state of Israel with regard to the handling of the conflict with Palestine.<sup>36</sup>

## Enmity against other minority groups in the country

There are minority groups in Italy that are more discriminated against than the Jewish minority (for reasons other than those that explain the aversion to Jews).<sup>37</sup> The dominant perception in Italian society is that other forms of discrimination are more evident than antisemitism, which is perceived in Italy as a marginal problem, existing as an attitude of offence and insult that is not always intentional and semantically grounded. According to the sources consulted,<sup>38</sup> the most discriminated minorities, in order of priority, are:

- a. ethnic minorities related to migrant flows from Africa and the Middle East
- b. Muslim minority
- c. Roma and Sinti minority
- d. LGBTQ+ minority

Data from Italy shows that 37% of respondents from sub-Saharan Africa and 20% of North Africans have felt discriminated against because of their skin colour over the past five years, and 32% of those from Asia from the South felt discriminated against because of their ethnic origin. About 10% of sub-Saharan Africans have felt discriminated against because of religion. Discrimination also involves second generations of foreign origin; in fact, 29% of women and 19% of men of sub-Saharan origin, 37% of women and 31% of men with North African origins and 21% of groups of South Asian origin have suffered some form of discrimination. The report refers to these findings as “relatively high rates of discrimination.” Regarding discrimination in access to work, the report highlights that 23% of people interviewed of North African origin reported some form of discrimination during their job search.<sup>39</sup>

Specific stereotypes of lesser or greater severity are linked to each of these minorities, such as

group a. delinquents, drug dealers, people who take jobs away from Italians, group b. terrorists, untrustworthy people, people who restrict women's freedom and do not respect their rights, people who want to impose their faith, group c. people who steal, group d. people with illnesses, and people who do not respect Catholic morals and socially accepted customs. The presence of these prejudices and the construction of these stereotypes are mainly due to nationalist and anti-European-oriented media narratives, which manipulate and direct public opinion, as well as to the publication of content and comments by individual citizens on social networks that inflame the debate and reinforce prejudice. Discriminatory attitudes, behaviours or acts of hatred towards minorities, in general, occur mainly online in the form of insults or accusations and, only in rare cases, reach levels of extreme violence. The people responsible for these acts share a low cultural level and, sometimes, a precarious economic situation. The prejudices associated with different categories of minorities are structured and sedimented in the civic consciousness due to media and partly political narratives.<sup>40</sup>

These latter narratives influence public opinion by manipulating democratic instruments through propaganda that can be described as 'fascist' even if it does not present itself as such in content but in method.

Although things such as “the superiority of a race”, or “the uselessness of the memory of the partisan Resistance”, or “the uselessness of Remembrance Day” cannot



be openly declared, the message passes in other forms in a non-explicit manner, i.e. through socially accepted language in all discourses, free of right-wing or left-wing labels.

Discourses that are potentially very dangerous are those that are inherently fascist but in which the nationalist ideology is not overtly recognisable. In order to feed their ideology, these discourses need to 'construct' an enemy. The process of constructing the enemy category involves several steps: naming enemies with an undefinable identity, not with a name and surname, which means that the enemy can be embodied by generic categories, e.g. "immigrants" or "Muslims".

In a second moment, the enemy is annihilated by passing the message that he's not respectable. Annihilation and dehumanisation are possible through the identification of the enemy with animals e.g. goat, cockroach, pig, rat, or through the use of nicknames that distort his name or focus on a physical defect (if he is short he is called "dwar"). If one points out the offensive and inappropriate use of such vocabulary, one can always retort that the tone was joking and that one had no intention of offending, but in the meantime, one will have achieved the objective of getting that deformed name into everyone's head, with the result that in the long term this results in the reduction of a "man" to an object of denigration and hatred.

In Italian television debates, particularly on private, non-national channels or in newspapers, we see this kind of narrative where the category elected as the enemy is portrayed as not respectable and also "guilty" and "threatening". The "victim" is delegitimised, and the guilt of an individual is attributed to the category to which he or she belongs, e.g. all Muslims are considered terrorists and all Roma/sinti are considered thieves, constructing imaginary equivalences on the basis of a mechanism of identification, transfer and projection of the part to the whole. The enemy thus described becomes someone with whom it is impossible to converse, someone who can be

assimilated to a strong power, who always has ulterior motives that would harm us and with respect to whom we must protect ourselves and therefore distance ourselves, reject him. On this ground, conspiracy is implanted.

The political narratives we have described use the media in an "ostensibly democratic" manner, which means giving the final word to the last person who should be able to speak, using the supposed democratic principle of giving everyone a voice. In this "speaking of the people to the people", there is a total annihilation of competences, mystification, trivialisation and the systematic and endless repetition of simple slogans that become hammered buzzwords, which get into people's heads and implant prejudice. The process of sedimentation of prejudice then gives rise to stereotypes that serve to fuel the leadership of potentially dangerous political figures.<sup>41</sup>

As the interviews revealed, a judgment shared especially by young students and university students is that the state should take charge of these minorities by guaranteeing the application of the rights enshrined in the Italian constitution as well as launching new measures to combat discrimination because the existing ones have not proved effective. Even the educating community, such as schools and the associations' sector, should and could do more to build a society in which the new generations are open to confrontation and free of prejudice.

Nevertheless, they themselves have been subjected to acts of discrimination linked, on the one hand, to traditionalism and cultural conservatism of a Catholic matrix, for example, concerning different sexual orientations. On the other hand, it is linked to the racism of some Italian citizens, hostile to the reception of migrants and refugees, for reasons related to identity nationalism and the Italian socio-economic situation, which only constitutionally but not de facto, guarantees all citizens the same rights relating to work and dignified life.

## Intersections of antisemitism with other forms of racism and intolerance

The history of Nazi-fascism shows a relationship between various forms of racism and antisemitism. The persecutions during the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century affected various minorities for ethnic, religious, political and sexual orientation reasons, such as the extermination of Roma and Sinti between 1939 and 1945 or the 'homocaust', i.e. the extermination of German homosexuals or even the extermination of disabled people of the 'Aryan race', according to the eugenic programme.<sup>42</sup> The presence of an intersection between antisemitic sentiments and other forms of discrimination in Italy today is attested by the research conducted by the Antisemitism Observatory and reported in the article "Hate speech in online social platforms: An intersectional case of antisemitism and homophobia in the Italian context".<sup>34</sup> Data show that social platforms are a receptacle for hate speech and an active space for discrimination. It is easy to find offensive posts and hate speech on the main social networks that adhere to the EU Code of Conduct, and the situation is even more extreme on platforms that do not adhere to the EU Code of Conduct, so two urgent needs are brought to attention: firstly, that of extending the Code of Conduct on Countering Unlawful Incitement to Hate Online to those social media platforms that have yet to adhere to it, and secondly, the need for "civil society organisations, researchers, activists and politicians to adopt an intersectionally informed approach to anti-discrimination policies".<sup>44</sup>

Amnesty International Italy's 2021 report<sup>45</sup> focused on hate narratives during the pandemic. The analysis of 36,269 Facebook and Twitter contents showed that one in ten posts and tweets were offensive, discriminatory or inciting to hatred: 'According to the report, online hate speech in Italy increased by 40 per cent compared to the previous

year. 55.6 per cent of content focused on anti-religious narratives about minorities, followed by anti-ziganism (47.6 per cent) and anti-immigrant (42.1 per cent) narratives. The LGBTQ+ community was the most targeted group with 98.2% of hate speech content, followed by Muslims with 46% and NGOs and individuals working in human rights related activities more generally with 25.9%".<sup>46</sup> Incitement to hatred is not specifically regulated by the Italian penal code, but the Mancino law of 1993 (Article 604bis of the penal code), later amended in 2006, establishes penalties of up to one year and six months imprisonment for persons found guilty of incitement or racist propaganda on ethnic, national or religious grounds. However, the important fact that highlights the need for a holistic and intersectional approach and also contributes to a better understanding of the profile of the antisemite is that the accounts that spread antisemitic hatred are often the same ones that spread homophobic, transphobic, anti-ziganism, xenophobia and racism. In the article 'Discussions about antisemitism need to include gender and sexuality' published on 9 January 2023, the focus is on the important role that gender and sexuality play in antisemitism.



Jewish men are more discriminated against than Jewish women, and the reason lies in the fact that they are more identifiable in public. Orthodox Jews, for example, are more exposed to the risk of discrimination because they wear obvious identifying marks such as the kippah (skullcap) or shtreimel (fur hat), wear visible tzitzit (fringes) or wear a tallis (prayer shawl) and style their hair with payot (side curls). In fact, the article states that: "Men were 1.8 times more likely to experience a physical attack, 1.4 times more likely to be subjected to offensive or threatening comments, 2.3 times more likely to experience offensive gestures and staring stares. They were also 1.5 times more likely to experience antisemitism online.<sup>47</sup> This gender difference in antisemitism is also corroborated by iconography because most antisemitic drawings or pictures depict men, not women. Another relevant aspect is the correlation between antisemitism and sexual orientation, a fact often absent from discussions on antisemitism and yet, on closer inspection, already identified by the German Jewish historian G. Mosse in *Nationalism and Sexuality* (1984). In this work, Mosse argued that a typical feature of racist ideology was to link excessive libido to the so-called 'inferior races', so much so that the rise of nationalism used a narrative linking 'race' to sexuality. Jews, in fact, were considered libidinous and perverted. Even today, this intersection exists and is realised in the fact that some people, for example, non-heterosexual Jewish women, suffer 'double discrimination' as Jewish and as transgender. It is evident, therefore, that "many extremists are both antisemitic and anti-LGBTQ+ [...] Properly addressing antisemitism means considering how other aspects of identity might affect people's experiences of anti-Jewish discrimination or hatred".<sup>48</sup>



## Prevention of antisemitism in education

The field research showed that young students in Italian schools and universities have little knowledge of Judaism due to a lack of experience and direct contact with the Italian Jewish community, weak historical and religious knowledge because of the lack of accurate education on the subject, but also due to the lack of dialogue with the Italian Jewish community and the lack of involvement of the population in Jewish cultural initiatives and events. As shown by the important collection of articles concerning incidents of antisemitism in schools from 2013 to the present, produced by the Observatory of Antisemitism,<sup>49</sup> the phenomena of antisemitism in schools have increased significantly in recent years.

To contain and prevent these phenomena, there are some important educational actions:

- Extend the public debate on antisemitism and racism in general and be strong in condemning all acts of intolerance and hatred;
- Foster dialogue between cultures;
- Get to know the Jewish world as a whole;
- Put antisemitism in relation to other forms of intolerance;
- Create alliances and opportunities to meet in the world of sport, especially football, where episodes of antisemitism and/or Holocaust trivialisation are often encountered;
- Prosecuting hate speech and actions;
- Responding, i.e. on the web and social media;
- Bringing the Jewish story up to date by placing it within contemporary issues.

In November 2021, *The Guidelines on Countering Antisemitism in Schools*<sup>50</sup> were published in Italy containing important tools for institutions, schools, universities, and the world of communication. Through this instrument, Italy has shown that it aims to develop the work of educating and training youth in schools to enhance the history of the Jewish people, to try to decouple the work on antisemitism from the Shoah, taking into account that online new media education and digital literacy are also decisive. The Ministry of Education promotes the preservation of the memory of the Shoah and the education to respect differences against all forms of violence and discrimination. With this objective, it has established a series of collaborations with the Union of Italian Jewish Communities (UCEI), the National Museum of Italian Judaism and the Shoah (MEIS) and the Shoah Memorial.

Since 2001, the Ministry, in cooperation with the UCEI, has annually launched the national competition *Young people remember the Shoah*, dedicated to all school students of all levels and organises several remembrance trips for students, teachers and institutions each year.<sup>51</sup> With the aim of providing Italian teachers and students with a training tool on the themes of the Shoah, antisemitism and indifference to discrimination, the Ministry, in cooperation with the UCEI, has created the portal *School and Remembrance*,<sup>52</sup> which offers a platform for the exchange of best practices in the teaching of the Shoah among schools throughout the country.

There is also 'The Italian Network of Remembrance', which was

born from the collaboration between Museums and Holocaust Memorials in Italy.<sup>53</sup> With law no. 211 of 20 July 2000, the Italian Parliament recognised 27 January, the date on which the gates of Auschwitz were torn down, as the 'Day of Remembrance in remembrance of the extermination and persecution of the Jewish people and Italian military and political deportees to Nazi camps', specifying in art. 2, that on the occasion of that day 'ceremonies, initiatives, meetings and common moments of narration of the facts and reflection shall be organised, particularly in schools of all levels, on what happened to the Jewish people and the Italian military and political deportees to the Nazi camps to preserve in the future of Italy the memory of a tragic and dark period of history in Italy and Europe, and so that similar events may never happen again.'<sup>54</sup>

According to the survey reported in the CDEC Foundation's Annual Report on Antisemitism in Italy 2022, "nine out of ten students think it's important that the Shoah be remembered, and more than seven out of ten think it's very important. This is an extremely positive and encouraging result with respect to the work done so far by governments, institutions and schools on the value of remembering the Shoah.<sup>55</sup> Despite the strengths, there is a need for more knowledge about Jews and Jewish identity in schools.

In 2017, to coincide with the Holocaust Memorial Day celebrations, the Ministry sent a letter to schools of all levels containing the "National Guidelines for Holocaust Education at School".<sup>56</sup> It is also worth mentioning that educational materials and activities dealing with the themes of Judaism and antisemitism are available on many sites, reported in the research, including the website of the Antisemitism Observatory, which makes brochures, films, documentaries and lessons available to teachers and trainers.<sup>57</sup>

The field research revealed a number of critical issues in the world of school and education, such as:

1. The lack of Jewish experts in schools;

2. The need to programmatically include the history of the Jewish people, culture and religion in the three years of high school also through specific projects;
3. Partial use of available digital resources;
4. Lack of activities and projects related to knowledge, dialogue and social inclusion of discriminated minorities;
5. The need to increase the number of materials, experiences, and human resources available to the school, such as expert trainers, scholars, and researchers.

The topics on which we propose to work and reflect are:

- improving knowledge of Jewry and Judaism with reference to history, culture and religion, explaining, for example, the due differences between Orthodox Judaism and Reform Judaism, also referred to as liberal and progressive;
- disassociate the discussion of Judaism from antisemitism;
- identify unconscious prejudices that underlie individual and collective thinking and acting;
- uncover conspiracy theories and deconstruct the stereotypes and prejudices that support them with reference to antisemitism and other forms of discrimination present in Italian society;
- address the negation, distortion and trivialisation of the Shoah;
- dealing with antisemitism online;
- improving knowledge of the situation in the Middle East to make young people aware of the differences between Jews and the state of Israel.

Trainers' strategies for educating young people about diversity should include analysing topics



or conducting research and activities that aim to develop feelings of solidarity, inclusion and support for discriminated minorities through:

- The use of personal narratives to emphasise the diversity within the Jewish world to show that Jews, like people of other traditions, have many different religious beliefs and practices or none at all; the commonalities between Jews and others, such as cultural, socio-economic, geographical, linguistic and other characteristics; the positive impact that Jews, or other people from different religious or cultural communities, have on local, national and/or international contexts.
- The use of history lessons - at school, teach the history of Jews as part of local, national or international history, including the history of the State of Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian situation and using a multi-viewpoint approach; personalise history and tell the personal stories of Jews (common and well-known people who have contributed to the development of science, the arts, philosophy, etc.); consider how Jews, or other people from different religious or cultural communities, have contributed to the development of science, the arts, philosophy, etc.; consider how they have contributed to the development of the world. Take into account how various socially accepted stereotypes have had and have negative consequences regarding the rights enjoyed by men, women and members of certain groups or communities, including Jews, at various times in history and in the present; teach the origins and causes of antisemitism before and after the Holocaust, reaching out to the world today and taking care not to replace these lessons with specific lessons on the Holocaust.
- The use of personal narrative to emphasise the diversity within the Jewish world to show that Jews, like people of other traditions, have many different religious beliefs and practices or none at all; the commonalities between Jews and others, such as in terms of cultural, socio-economic, geographical, linguistic and other characteristics;

the positive impact that Jews, or other people from different religious or cultural communities, have on local, national and/or international contexts.

- The use of students' various identities to create their own self-portrait (in written, graphic or poetic form); working on individual ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural diversity, sexual orientation, hobbies, interests, and ideals; guide the students towards identifying certain aspects of their own self-portrait that may reveal or generate a stereotype based on factors, such as inner choices and external pressures, that influence thoughts and actions, to demonstrate how social narratives are constructed, analyse the relationship between a student's perception of some particular traits of themselves and others perceive these.

The work of educators must aim to achieve better results than in recent years with regard to combating ignorance, raising the cultural level of young people, including those who do not go to university studies, and refining critical thinking. In this perspective, it will also be possible to counter young people's precocious tendency to stereotyping and prejudice categorisation caused by media overexposure, leading to pseudo-learning of a vast amount of information adolescents cannot handle. It would be necessary as well as desirable that, among the skills that a young person must develop at the end of secondary and university schooling, there be inclusive social-relational skills to build a peaceful and supportive multi-ethnic European society capable of breaking down physical and mental walls and barriers between its citizens.

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- 8) Kovács A. e Fischer G., “Prejudices in Europe: Survey in 16 European Countries.”
- 9) Primary antisemitism/traditional antisemitism includes three dimensions: 1) cognitive – the content of prejudicial statements, 2) affective – the emotions felt towards the object of prejudice, 3) conative – the willingness to act in accordance with prejudice, to accept discrimination.
- 10) Secondary antisemitism is Holocaust relativisation, denial, and distortion.
- 11) New antisemitism is anti-Jewish sentiments projected onto Israel as a focal point.
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- 19) *Cit.*, “Dossier/Antisemitismo.”
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