

Antisemitism in Italy in 2020

Observatory of Antisemitism of the CDEC Foundation

The Observatory of Antisemitism of the CDEC (Contemporary Jewish Documentation Center) Foundation in Milan is the only center on the Italian Peninsula that daily monitors, collects, compiles and studies antisemitic incidents (assault, threats, damage and desecration, abusive behavior, etc.) occurred in Italy. The Observatory is especially engaged in monitoring antisemitism online due to its recent dramatic increase.

Antisemitic incidents are reported to Observatory in a number of ways, most commonly by e-mail, through the Observatory's website and by phone, in particular, through the 24hour hotline Antenna Antisemitismo (run on behalf of UCEI – Union of Italian Jewish Communities).

The Observatory documents and analyzes offline and online Jew-hatred, performs quantitative and qualitative surveys as well as targeted social studies on antisemitism; organizes opinion polls with sample size, Focus Groups, web sentiment analysis, inquiry on opinion leaders and research on the web. Moreover, it prepares an annual report on anti-Semitism in Italy for UCEI and for the Kantor Center of the Tel Aviv University as well as a quarterly report on antisemitism for UCEI and OSCAD (Italian Police department for protection against discrimination acts).

The Observatory disseminates collected information and data and supports initiatives that report and combat anti-Semitic acts. Its website (www.osservatorioantisemitismo.it), daily updated, numbers approximately 500 daily entries, at times it peaks 3,000. Web query from Google on the term "antisemitism" shows that Observatory website is on its page one, at the top of results.

The Observatory's archive includes the most comprehensive library in Italy of anti-Semitic books published since 1945. Moreover, it keeps numerous collections of antisemitic magazines, photos, audio and video tapes/recordings.

The Observatory's staff attends national and international conferences and congresses on antisemitism organized by numerous organizations such as, among others, the Kantor Center, the Global Forum for Combating Antisemitism, the Inter Parliamentary Coalition for Combating Antisemitism, the OSCE-ODIHR, the American Jewish Committee, and the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

The Observatory collaborates with institutions that deals with antisemitism: Kantor Center of Tel Aviv, Global Forum for Combating Antisemitism of Jerusalem, Community Security Trust of London, Institute for Jewish Policy Research of London, International Network Against Cyberhate of Amsterdam, the Australian Online Hate Prevention Institute e the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

The Observatory works, since December 2019, with Vox – Osservatorio Italiano sui diritti allo studio to the “La Mappa dell’Intolleranza” [Map of Intolerance], in collaboration with Università Statale of Milano, Università of Bari, Università La Sapienza of Rome and the Sociology Department of the Università Cattolica of Milano.

Antisemitism in Italy in 2020: methodological premise

The Observatory classifies an antisemitic incident as any malicious act aimed at Jewish people, organizations, or property, where there is evidence that the victim or victims were targeted because they are (or are believed to be) Jewish. In this vein, Observatory has adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism.

The Observatory does not trawl the internet looking for online incidents to log. It records only the antisemitic incidents occurred in Italy that are reported either by media or by a member of the public (report voiced by phone or mail via Antenna antisemitismo) who fulfills the role of victim or witness.

The total of antisemitic incidents recorded in 2020 by Observatory is only indicative, as the actual amount of antisemitic incidents is much larger. An accurate figure would be impossible to quantify. It is more frequent a serious antisemitic incident to be reported than a verbal or written one. Hence, the collected data mirror only the reported incidents and not the whole spectrum of antisemitic incidents occurred throughout the year in Italy. The under-reporting, namely the lack of reporting of antisemitic incidents, represents a significant problem as it distorts the real understanding of the phenomenon. A second relevant problem is the under-recording: police forces or the legal units fail in adjudging a crime to be antisemitic.

In any case, it is undeniable that existing data indicate that antisemitism is on the rise. Antisemitism keeps growing visibility on social media, it has become normalized, and harassment is a daily occurrence.

This report describes Antisemitic incidents perpetrated in Italy by single individuals or groups of extremists – neo-Nazis, haters of Israel, religious fanatics etc. – which disseminate their hatred mainly on online platforms. Whereas violent anti-Jewish acts distinguish the extremist political groups (right, left, etc.), prejudice against Jews is widely spread among socio-cultural classes and political and ideological groups. Prejudice emerges in many forms, from different sides of the political spectrum.

Given the ever-growing online antisemitism, and thus a greater liquidity of contemporary antisemitism, starting from this year (2020 report) the Observatory will publish a summary considering distinctively **offline episodes** (insults, threats, graffiti, writing on doorbells, insults to schools, etc.) from **online episodes** (social network profiles, websites, blogs, Twitter, Zoombombing, etc.). Being aware of the methodological difficulties of depicting the complexity of attitudes and of a multifaceted ideology such as antisemitism.

Antisemitism in Italy

Antisemitism is not a problem related to the past but is also a current one; it's a matter of fact we can see through events, the language of certain social media, and in some major news. Antisemitism can show up with many different shades, changing due to the political, economic and social situation, which dictates its spread and visibility. The incubation periods alternate with the active ones when antisemitism comes back in the public debate because of global problems, economic crisis, and social and cultural changes. While during latency periods antisemitism occupies only restricted territories, and is carried out in limited fields, during critical phases those limits can be easily overcome. The current economic and social situation, combined with the ongoing pandemic, creates a favorable environment for the raise of antisemitic attitudes.

The concern posed by antisemitism has been understood by the Italian Parliament, which in January 2020 founded the National Coordination for the Fight against Antisemitism, led by the pedagogue and former MP Milena Santerini.

On January 27, 2020, to celebrate the Holocaust Remembrance Day, the Council of Ministers pointed out its commitment to promote and strengthen the memory of the Holocaust and to oppose any kind of antisemitism. In order to do that, they entirely adopted the IHRA definition of antisemitism, using it as their main reference to recognize antisemitic expressions and behaviors. That's why on June 16, 2020 the Presidency of the Council of Ministers created a task force for the recognition of the IHRA definition of antisemitism, formed by representatives of the institutions, of the ministries, of Jewish organizations and CDEC's Observatory of Antisemitism. After 14 public hearings, the task force made its last report in December 2020.

Coronavirus and antisemitism

From March 14 on, the Antenna antisemitismo started to receive reports of incidents (all on the internet) which accused Jews of being responsible (or co-responsible) for Covid-19; in which the "poisoning by Jews" motif was found 18 times.

The "poisoning by Jews" motif was found 134 times among the 3.977 posts and online discussions of the 300 social media profiles of extremists which the Observatory of Antisemitism monitored in 2020.

This motif was not a central theme on antisemitic attacks; the pandemic is provoking a wave of secondary antisemitism, as it is seen as part of a big "globalist" conspiracy designed to increase the control of the population (the "herd") by "Zionist" transnational organizations, and tycoons such as George Soros and Bill Gates.

Even the biggest online spreaders of conspiracy theories, like Maurizio Blondet's blog (circa 30 thousand daily views), or the video blog ByoBlu (with its videos being

watched by thousands of users), have not given a particular importance to the subject “Jews-Covid19.”

In Italy, the debate on the virus was mainly related to conspiracy theories, and anti-Chinese xenophobia: Covid-19 is either a biological warfare tool (which leaked or was leaked from Chinese laboratories), or a tool for social control created by élite groups (EU, transnational institutions, the military, pharmaceutical companies).

Coronavirus and conspiracy theories

The impact of Covid-19 on social media platforms was strong and virulent, motivated by a conspiracy theory sentiment. The pervasiveness of the conspiracy approach is in its commitment to make sense of situations which are hard to understand, as the Coronavirus, and above all to identify who’s blame is it: behind each problem there is someone who conspires against us. Those who are influenced by conspiracy myths identify themselves with a radicalized and distorted view of reality, and have a profound distrust of authority, institutions, the State, the government, and also of the community in charge of solving a given problem (doctors, virologists, etc.). No-Vax groups have frequently used metaphors related to the Shoah in their protest, presenting themselves as the “new Jews.”

Coronavirus and antisemitism

Antisemitic conspiracy theories, and the online disinformation campaign related to Covid-19 were the central arguments of the third meeting of the European Commission antisemitism working group on the implementation of the declaration of the Council on combating antisemitism. The meeting was held on June 17, 2020,¹ bringing together representatives from Member States, from the European Commission, from FRA, and from Jewish community’s organizations from all over the European Union. The discussions during the meeting showed that online antisemitic conspiracy myths are not associated to a particular political group: these myths are spread by a wide range of people and groups. Furthermore, online disinformation on Covid-19 reaches a wider public in comparison to the informational messages in regard to the virus.

The main traits of antisemitic discourse in 2020

- The most widespread antisemitic motif is that connected to economic matters: obscure Jewish-Zionist lobbies—thanks to the sprawling power of banks, and international organizations—govern, and manage the world.

¹ <https://fra.europa.eu/en/event/2020/european-commission-antisemitism-working-group-meet>

- Antisemites continue to depict Jews according to archaic and popular judeophobic myths, and antisemitic canards, such as: blood libel, ritual murder, deicide, hate against the human species, etc.
- Jews are depicted according to old Nazi physiognomic models (hooked noses, grinning mouths, goatee beards, etc.). They are described according to stereotypes: rich, connected to each other, inclined to conspiracies and to world domination (“the Zionist octopus”), exploiters, racist, elitist, loyal to Israel, and internationalists. Sometimes this demonization reaches to forms of pseudo-biologicistic antisemitism, as in the case of Giovanni Cianti’ and Mauro Biglino’s books and conferences that describe Jews as a pseudo-human “race.”
- All Jews are described as “Zionists”, and Zionism is understood as evil.
- The start of the parliamentary debate of the Zan Law against homo-transphobia² kick-started a wave of antisemitic and homophobic tweets connected to the debate of a law aimed at countering hate crime and hate speech against LGBTQI people. The tycoon George Soros is designated as the person behind this law, and this is part of his plan to corrupt the morals of the world population.

Incidents reported to the Antenna Antisemitismo

In 2020, the Observatory of Antisemitism received 332 reports; after several in-depth analysis, 230 of these reports have been recognized as antisemitic incidents. 50 reports were related to incidents occurring offline, and 180 are related to online antisemitism.

Graffiti	22
Threats	13
Defamation	12
Discrimination	1
Physical attacks	1
Antisemitism in the mainstream media	1
Total (offline)	50
Online antisemitism	180
Total	230

² <http://www.senato.it/service/PDF/PDFServer/DF/356433.pdf>

Besides these numbers, which have been gathered together from the warnings received by the Antenna Antisemitismo, the real amount of antisemitic incidents is far greater. In 2020, the Observatory of Antisemitism also found:

308 antisemitic websites

300 antisemitic Facebook profiles, which published 3997 posts and online discussions.

900 antisemitic twitter profiles (according to Mediavox)

104.347 hostile tweets (according to the Osservatorio Vox Diritti)

Since those surveys are related to heterogeneous sources, media and research tools, the summary should be seen as an example of the Italian context.

Antisemitic incidents reported by:

Non-Jews or people who are not identified as such	105
Jewish Community members	97
Mainstream media	21
Emails sent to the Observatory of Antisemitism	7
Total	230

Location

In 71 out of 230 offline antisemitic incidents, it has been possible to identify the city where it happened: Asolo, Bari, Bologna (2), Bagheria, Cagliari, Faenza (2), Firenze (2), Fondi, Forlì (2), Garbagnate Milanese, Genova, Latina, Livorno, Mestre, Milano (19), Mondovì, Napoli, Padova, Palermo, Pavia, Pinerolo, Pistoia, Pomezia, Pozzuoli, Riva del Garda, Reggio Calabria (3), Roma (6), San Daniele del Friuli, Schio, Siracusa, Tivoli, Torino (3), Torrebelvicino, Trento, Trieste (2), Valenza, Venezia (2), Vicenza.

Victims of antisemitism

151 incidents involve Jews and/or Jewish institutions, depicted as: racist, rich, greedy, conspiring for World domination, "Zionists".

Here's a list of the most used terms: Zionist, "giudei", Israelites, Talmudists, Khazars, Ashkenazi, "Nazi-Zionists", racist and Hitlerian Zionists, Zionist organs thieves,

Nazi Secret Service (referred to the State of Israel), SS (Super Sionisti), Israel uber alles, Zionist octopus, Jewish race, Hebrew cancer, Hebrew mob cancer, schnoz, cockroaches, rats, Jewish disease, plague spreaders, foreskinners, Jewish-Zionist lobbies, Jewish banks, Jewish bankers, Jewish lobby, Judaeo-bolshevism, Cabala, Jewish masonry, Jewish International, New World Order, Globalist Zionist stateless usury, Zionist parasites, masonic and satanic élite, Synagogue of Satan, deicide, \$hoah, Jews as fuel (referred to when they were burned in the concentration camps), international Zionism, Illuminati, Elders of Zion.

Zionist is the most used terms in anti-Jewish discussions, mostly with a negative meaning: Zionism is used as a synonym of a metaphysical Evil, and Zionists are described as devoted to the Evil, cruel, murderers, mendacious, racist, organs thieves, etc.

79 incidents are related to Jewish individuals and/or institutions, described with negative stereotypes. The most common targets are: Holocaust survivor Liliana Segre, Holocaust survivor Sami Modiano, MP Emanuele Fiano, Holocaust survivor Nedo Fiano, journalist David Parenzo, billionaire George Soros, the Rothschild Family, the Elkann Family, the Jewish Community in Milan, the Jewish Community in Rome, CDEC's Observatory of Antisemitism, UCEI (Union of the Italian Jewish Communities).

Books

In 2020, 65 books with antisemitic content have been published in Italy (they were 50 in 2019); 20 are anti-Jewish classics, and 45 are new.