

**Anti-Semitism
in Italy
2019**

Annual Activity Report by Osservatorio antisemitismo of the CDEC Foundation in Milan, Italy.

In-depth analyses, news and images on anti-Semitism in Italy are available on the website: www.osservatorioantisemitismo.it

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ANTENNA ANTISEMITISMO

Sei vittima o testimone
di un episodio antisemita?

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Osservatorio antisemitismo of the CDEC Foundation

The Osservatorio antisemitismo 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 anti-Semitic incidents (assault, threats, damage and desecration, abusive behavior, etc.) occurred in Italy. Osservatorio is especially engaged in monitoring anti-Semitism online due to its recent dramatic increase.

Anti-Semitic incidents are reported to Osservatorio in a number of ways, most commonly by mail, through the Osservatorio's website and by phone, in particular, through the 24hour hotline Antenna Antisemitismo (run on behalf of UCEI – Union of Italian Jewish Communities). It is a facility established to record and analyze reports (voiced by phone or by mail) of anti-Semitic incidents.

Osservatorio documents and analyzes offline and online Jew-hatred, performs quantitative and qualitative surveys as well as targeted social studies on anti-Semitism; organizes opinion poll with simple 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 anti-Semitism for UCEI and OSCAD (Italian Police department for protection against discrimination acts).

Osservatorio 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 “anti-Semitism” shows that Osservatorio website is on its page one, at the top of results.

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

Osservatorio staff attends national and international conferences and congresses on anti-Semitism 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.

Osservatorio collaborates with institutions that deals with anti-Semitism: 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.

Osservatorio 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.

Anti-Semitism in Italy in 2019: methodological premise

Osservatorio classifies an anti-Semitic 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, Osservatorio has adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) working definition of Anti-semitism.

Osservatorio does not trawl the internet looking for online incidents to log. It records only the anti-Semitic 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 anti-Semitic incidents recorded in 2019 by Osservatorio is only indicative, as the actual amount of anti-Semitic incidents is much larger. An accurate figure would be impossible to quantify. It is more frequent a serious anti-Semitism 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 anti-Semitic incidents occurred throughout the year in Italy. The under-reporting, namely the lack of reporting of anti-Semitic 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 anti-Semitic.

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

This report describes Anti-Semitic 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.

Anti-Semitic Incidents in Italy in 2019

In 2019 Osservatorio antisemitismo registered 251 anti-Semitic incidents, a significant higher number compared to 2018 (197).

	2019	2018	2017
January	23	14	13
February	22	13	10
March	17	8	3
April	26	24	8
May	26	24	10
June	20	25	10
July	21	20	19
August	13	14	4
September	22	13	14
October	19	16	9
November	24	13	21
December	18	13	9
TOTAL	251	197	130

Anti-Semitic Incident Categories

Posts (recorded to Osservatorio antisemitismo)	173
Defamation and insults	31
Graffiti/Imagery	23
Threats	9
Anti-Semitism on mass-media	5
Vandalism	3
Banalization	3
Assaults	2
Discrimination	2
TOTALE	251

Online Anti-Semitism

The rise of anti-Semitic incidents and, in particular incidents that involve social media, is related to events that see the Jews and / or the State of Israel at the center of attention.

The second half of 2019 in Italy was characterized by two significant phenomena. The growth of intolerance and Holocaust denial, which prompted the Italian Government to appoint Professor Milena Santerini as national coordinator for the fight against Anti-Semitism, and the gravitation of the political debate around the Italian Senator for life (survivor of Auschwitz Nazi concentration camp) Liliana Segre.

Anti-Semitism is increasing at the global level and wildly prevalent in social media. One of the main issues today regarding anti-Semitism is the standardization of the phenomenon on the web, which gives anti-Semitic speech a tremendously loud and hateful echo. Social media has proven an essential and convenient vessel, through which those who wish to harass, abuse and threaten Jewish individuals and institutions, as well as those who simply wish to disseminate their prejudice, are able to freely express their anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism is fully legitimized. Even more troubling, anti-Semitic messages often include incitement to violence.

Numerous sites function around the clock to advance racial hatred, preaching white supremacy, classical anti-Semitism, and more violence-inspiring prejudice, all of which, not ineptly, have been suggestively lumped together under the label of "Hate". In such environment, the promotion of conspiracy theories, the resurgence of stereotypes from the Middle Ages, the demonization of Jews / Zionists and the Jewish state, the use of the Jews / Zionists as a scapegoat has become the norm. They may lead, as consequence, to fierce actions against the Jews.

Web 2.0 has allowed the development of a culture in which racism, intolerance and anti-Semitism have been socially accepted, particularly among young people. A case study: a Whatsapp group called "Shoah Party", created by Italian teens (October 2019), shared anti-Semitic, racist, Nazis and pedopornographic contents.

Online anti-Semitism is openly conveyed and expressed while using extremely aggressive and demonizing iconographic and lexical forms. Anti-Semitic posts are innumerable. Osservatorio antisemitismo regularly monitors about 200 social media (Facebook, Twitter, VK, etc.). In 2019 Osservatorio selected and collected 2.565 posts [652 of groups like "Revisionismo Storico", "Fronte Palestina", "Rothschild la bestia che domina il mondo" (Rothschild the beast that runs the world), etc. and 1.913 of individuals like Chris el Malik, Joe Fallisi, Fra-Fra-Fra, etc.].

Prevalent online anti-Semitic posts and discourses are related to (sorted below by order of relevance):

- Neonazis/Neofascism ideology
- Conspiracy theories
- Anti-Zionism ideology
- Banalization and trivialization of the Shoah

In 2019 Osservatorio recorded 314 online websites which share anti-Semitic contents. Osservatorio has classified them by four ideological standpoints (see below), although their discourses often overlap. Jew-hatred easily shape-shifts to fit the purposes of many ideologies.

Radical right: 118

Anti-Semitism has always been part of the far-right extremist and neo-Nazi speech. On the web, far right extremist websites and social network groups are quite active demonstrating, through their various publication, the supremacy of the White race and the danger “caused by” the Jewish people in Europe. They promote Nazi theories with strict symbols and codes.

C Conspiracy: 112

The resurgence of conspiracy is more than popular on the web. These websites spread the theories which accuse Jews of being responsible for the most recent and tragic events, in order to supposedly control the world. These theories have been quite popular since the end of the 19th century with the publication of the famously false book “Protocols of the Elders of Zion”. The access to the web gave these theories a “second chance” by using the same approach as a century ago.

Anti-Zionism: 68

These websites apply classical anti-Semitic stereotypes (e.g. deicide, blood libel accusation, exploitation, hatred against mankind) to the State of Israel and to “Zionists”.

Holocaust Denial: 16

A constant trend in anti-Semitic discourse is Holocaust denial and distortion, and a manipulation of the Shoah for anti-Semitic purposes. These websites attempt to negate the established facts of the Nazi genocide of European Jews. Holocaust denial and distortion generally claim that the Holocaust was invented or exaggerated by Jews as part of a plot to advance Jewish interests.

The Italian most virulent anti-Semitic website is “Maurizio Blondet&Friends” (about 30,000 daily entries). It regularly blogs anti-Semitic articles.

Anti-Semitic threats

Even if anti-Semitism was always prevalent amongst far-right extremists and branches of neo-Nazis, a trend is popular among other groups, for example the anti-Zionists pro-BDS, the global movement of boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel.

Anti-Semitic allegations include a wide array of conspiracy theories which blame Jews for many problems. This issue has crystallized around a series of clichés – prominent in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion – purportedly describing the Jewish plan for global domination. It also targets the straw man stereotype of Jews as bankers in control of the world’s economies, manipulators of public opinion abusing mass media, and oppressors of independent nations’ free potential. This stereotype arsenal has diversified by adding a series of new characters (for instance the “American Jewish lobby”, etc.) and also movements like the “No Vax”.

The Arab-Israeli conflict helps to feed antipathy towards the Jews, as they are popularly associated with Israel and its politics. Some key aspects of Israeli society are compared to Nazi Germany, for instance equating the Gaza Strip with concentration camps in Nazi-occupied Europe. The demonization of the State of Israel, considered the embodiment of all evil, fuels Anti-Semitism. Invariably, the most popular, recurring and present anti-Semitic allegations refer to the State of Israel.

Holocaust denial, distortion and trivialization, which strengthen anti-Semitic hatred and conspiracy-fuelled sentiments, are disseminated on social platforms. "New" anti-Semitism shares most of its traits with the "old" anti-Semitism prevalent in Europe until the end of the Second World War. Blood libel accusation recurs as a regular motif in the anti-Jewish propaganda campaign, old and new caricatures of the Jews/Zionists – stressing grotesque facial features, avidity or criminal activities – as well as anti-Semitic tropes percolate no end in the web.

An accelerating, alarming trend of anti-Semitic incidents occurred in schools: verbal abuses directed at Jewish students, online trivialization of the Shoah, anti-Semitic offences posted on Facebook by teachers.

Defamation and insults

Perpetrators are usually neo-Nazis, anti-Zionists pro BDS and those who accuse Jews of conspiracy. Case study: rabbis of five Italian Jewish Communities received by regular mail symbols (flags, pennants, stickers, etc.) of the Palestinian cause propaganda.

Graffiti/Imagery

Most of the perpetrators are far right extremists. They often are hooligans of Italian soccer teams. The word "Jew" or anti-Semitic jeers are shouted/written to insult the opponent team. The main target of anti-Semitic hatred remains Holocaust victim Anne Frank, whose name and image have become in the last decades an unwelcome focus of offenders. Case studies: the star of David was spray-painted on a wall next to the shop of a Jewish trader in Leghorn and some swastikas on the intercom of a Jewish couple of Rome (he is a rabbi and the wife a teacher).

Threats

Perpetrators are usually far right extremists, although one of the most virulent offenders on social media is a far left ex-terrorist.

Vandalism

Most of damage and desecration incidents are perpetrated by far right extremists. Case studies: on the periphery of Asti a farmer reproduced on his field, using his tractor, a gigantic swastika. In Fosdinovo (town in Central Italy) some Neonazis vandalized the Partisans commemorative plaque. A young hooligan (filmed by security camera) broke with a blunt object a window of the Trieste synagogue.

Physical Assaults

For the first time in years two anti-Semitic assaults were recorded: in Rome a woman was spat in the face by a neo-Nazi, and in Prunetto (small town in Northern Italy) a man was insulted and slapped by a stranger.

Discrimination

Discrimination incidents refer to anti-Zionism/far left extremism. Case study: in Sardinia an Israeli musician was removed from a music Festival program as considered a "Zionist". BDS-Italy has promoted a vast campaign to boycott Israeli goods. About 100 far left organizations have joined the BDS-Italy campaign.

Public speech

Osservatorio investigates and focuses also on the opinion of Italians about Jews. In the last decades, racist and anti-Semitic prejudices have become by and large more legitimate. Prejudices and stereotypes against the Jews are common in public speeches of Italian public figures. They foment xenophobia, intolerance and Anti-Semitism. Their anti-Semitic expressions go unchallenged, they are widely disseminated, amplified and shared on social platforms, often re-posted or doubled down. Some politicians, professors, intellectuals and journalists have used fake news to corroborate their anti-Semitic claims.

Anti-Semitic Books

In 2019 Osservatorio antisemitismo registered the publication of 50 anti-Semitic books (49 in 2018). 15 are re-printed books, whereas 35 are new books. Books such as Gogol's "Taras Bulba" or Simenon's "The Madman of Bergerac" – despite their anti-Semitic prejudices and sinister sentiments – are not included in the total. Only books devoted to polemic against the Jews are enumerated.

Italian publishing houses that release anti-Semitic books are numerous, some have been active since the Sixties. Most of the published books contain conspiracy theories. Some are re-prints of Nazi ideologues' texts, some other support Holocaust denial theories, etc. 21 Italian publishing houses published in 2019 anti-Semitic books:

- 9 are linked to conspiracy ideology
- 6 are linked to far right ideology
- 3 are linked to pre-council Catholicism
- 1 is linked to far left ideology
- 1 is linked to Islamism
- 1 does not relate to any particular ideology, it is rather a general publishing company.

Although the anti-Semitic books published in 2019 received almost no attention by mass-media, they were attentively reviewed by numerous social networks, websites, fora etc. Some books, in particular those dealing with conspiracy theories, sell very well. They are available on Amazon or IBS.