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Italian Federation for Human Rights

IPHR International Partnership for Human Rights

Practical Guide

TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION

Understanding TNR, protecting your rights



A practical guide for people exposed to threats, intimidation, misuse of legal in struments, digital attacks or pressure attributable to foreign state actors.

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About this guide

This guide provides practical information for people who may be affected by transnational repression (TNR) in Italy. It is designed to support the early identification of TNR, the documentation of incidents, and access to appropriate legal, digital security, psychosocial and institutional support.

Disclaimer

This guide provides general information and practical guidance. It does not constitute legal advice. If you are facing threats, arrest, an extradition request, digital attacks, or risks relating to your asylum application or residence status, seek advice from a specialised lawyer as soon as possible.

Organisations

International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR)

IPHR is an independent non-governmental organisation established in 2008. With a presence in Brussels, Kyiv, and Tbilisi, IPHR works closely with civil society groups in Eastern Europe, South Caucasus, and Central Asia to raise human rights concerns at the international level and promote respect for the rights of vulnerable communities. IPHR has been documenting atrocity crimes committed in the context of Russia's war on Ukraine since 2014 and has been using collected evidence for accountability purposes.

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Italian Federation for Human Rights – Italian Helsinki Committee (FIDU)

FIDU is a non-profit civil society organisation active since 1987. It promotes and protects human rights on the basis of international instruments including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Helsinki Final Act. Based in Rome and active at national and international levels, FIDU monitors violations, raises public awareness and promotes compliance by states with their human rights obligations.

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What is transnational repression?

Transnational repression (TNR) refers to actions undertaken by governments or groups linked to them to repress and control people such as dissidents, activists, journalists or political opponents beyond their national borders. These actions seek to suppress freedom of expression, political criticism and human rights work abroad.

TNR is not a series of isolated incidents. It is a systemic and political phenomenon that combines the use of legal instruments with unlawful or ostensibly lawful practices. Its primary purpose is to push individuals and entire communities into self-censorship and inactivity, silence them, or compel them to return to their country of origin.

People targeted by TNR may experience serious human rights violations, including physical and psychological threats, interference with private life and breaches of privacy, misuse of international law-enforcement cooperation mechanisms such as INTERPOL, cyberattacks and the risk of unlawful extradition.

TNR is also deliberately unpredictable. Targets are not limited to the most publicly visible individuals. Family members, colleagues, community members, journalists, activists and less visible critics may also be targeted. This is one of the ways in which fear spreads throughout entire communities.

How to recognise possible forms of TNR

The situations below may indicate that you are being targeted. No single sign is necessarily conclusive, but an accumulation of signs, especially over time, suggests that it is time to prepare and seek support.

Physical threats and intimidation

- Assaults, attacks or direct threats by government agents or individuals linked to them, in Italy or across borders.

Judicial persecution and misuse of international mechanisms

- Misuse of international arrest warrants, INTERPOL Red Notices, diffusions or other alerts to intimidate, arrest, detain or expel individuals.

- Criminal proceedings initiated against you in absentia in your country of origin.

Cyber threats

- Cyberattacks, phishing, doxing, spyware or other forms of digital surveillance intended to collect private information, disrupt your activities or instil fear.

Interference with private life

- Physical or online surveillance, harassment or invasions of privacy through the monitoring of social media or other communication tools.

- Repeated, unusual or suspicious approaches by people you do not know well, disrupt your activities or instil fear.

Pressure on family members and close contacts

- Direct or indirect threats against people close to you, in your country of origin or abroad.

Restrictions on freedom of movement

- Placement on watchlists or other measures restricting freedom of movement, including passport revocation or travel bans.

- Refusal to issue or renew identity documents, or denial of consular or civil registration services.

Economic pressure

- Freezing of bank accounts, blocking of online fundraising campaigns, state measures targeting assets and economic resources, or seizure of property in the country of origin.

Additional situations that should not be overlooked

- Stigmatisation: being publicly labelled as a terrorist, extremist or criminal by the authorities of your country of origin in order to justify persecution and restrict your rights in the host country.

- Defamation and disinformation: smear campaigns intended to damage your reputation and undermine your credibility, including gender-based attacks, sexualised threats and threats to forcibly out LGBTQI+ people.

- Pressure through the community: repression carried out through diaspora networks, including isolation, intimidation and smear campaigns within your own community.

- Pressure involving children: refusal to issue birth certificates or other actions affecting children's legal identity, documentation, access to services or ability to travel.

- Deliberate normalisation: the authorities of the country of origin may present their actions as legitimate law-enforcement activity, making pressure against activists abroad appear justified and acceptable.

Early warning signs

Warning signs fall along a spectrum, from more distant indicators to immediate personal threats. A single sign may not be cause for alarm, but an increasing accumulation indicates that it is time to prepare.

- Distant warning signs: new TNR practices emerging in other countries or communities, especially when authoritarian regimes adopt methods already used by others.

- Proximate warning signs: new waves of repression or legislative changes in the country of origin, or newly reported cases involving members of your community in Italy or elsewhere.

- Immediate personal warning signs: your bank account is frozen in the country of origin, you receive a phishing message, you encounter unusual administrative obstacles, or someone contacts you unexpectedly and you do not understand why.

Remember: once may be an isolated incident. Twice may be a coincidence. Three times may indicate a recurring pattern.

Immediate safety checklist

- If you are in immediate danger, call 112.
- Contact a trusted person and avoid facing high-risk situations without support.
- Preserve evidence, including messages, emails, screenshots, links, telephone numbers, names, dates and locations.
- Do not directly confront suspected perpetrators or people who may be acting on their behalf.
- Do not share sensitive information through insecure channels.
- Contact a specialised lawyer or a trusted civil society organisation.
- In the event of a cyber incident, seek digital security support before deleting messages, resetting devices or making public allegations.
- If you are arrested or subject to an extradition request, do not sign anything before speaking to a lawyer.

1. Responding to threats, intimidation or cyberattacks

If you believe that you are being targeted by TNR, act promptly to protect yourself and your rights. These are the main steps to take.

Seeking protection

1. Contact a lawyer with expertise in immigration and human rights law.

2. Contact an organisation that protects the rights of migrants or foreign nationals.

3. Apply for international protection if this is relevant to your situation (see Section 2).

4. If you already have refugee status or are otherwise a beneficiary of international protection, inform the Italian authorities of any threats.

5. Avoid contact with representatives of your country of origin unless you have first assessed the risks with a lawyer or trusted organisation.

6. Review your digital security, including social media accounts, messaging apps, cloud storage, devices, passwords and two-factor authentication.

Reporting the threat to the Italian authorities

- Law-enforcement authorities (Questura/Italian State Police or Carabinieri): report threats, intimidation, harassment or other incidents relevant to your safety.

- Public Prosecutor's Office (Procura della Repubblica): file a report or criminal complaint (denuncia or querela) if you are facing a specific threat, preferably with legal assistance.

- For cyber incidents, consider contacting the specialised cybercrime units of the Italian State Police (Polizia Postale), particularly in cases involving phishing, spyware, account compromise, online impersonation, doxing, cyberstalking or the non-consensual dissemination of intimate or manipulated images. Where possible, seek legal advice or digital security support before submitting evidence, so that relevant information is properly preserved.

Challenging an abusive INTERPOL Notice or diffusion

If you believe that you are the subject of an INTERPOL Red Notice, diffusion or other INTERPOL-related alert that is being misused, seek specialised legal assistance immediately. Authoritarian governments may misuse international police cooperation mechanisms to target dissidents, activists, journalists and political opponents abroad. A specialised lawyer can help you assess whether to submit a request to the Commission for the Control of INTERPOL's Files (CCF), including for access to, correction or deletion of data processed in INTERPOL's systems.

> **Psychosocial impact**
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> Transnational repression can cause prolonged psychological distress. Fear, isolation, guilt or anxiety about family members abroad are recognised consequences of TNR, not personal failings. If you are struggling, consider reaching out to a trusted person, a community organisation or a mental health professional.

2. Applying for asylum in Italy

If you are targeted by TNR and seek protection in Italy, you may apply for asylum. Transnational repression may be relevant to an application for international protection, particularly where it demonstrates a real risk of persecution, serious harm, torture or inhuman treatment, politically motivated criminal proceedings, or other rights violations upon return to the country of origin.

1. Contact the Immigration Office

- Submit your asylum application to the Immigration Office (Ufficio immigrazione) at the Questura in your city.

- Submit the application as soon as possible after arrival, or as soon as the risk emerges. Delays may make it more difficult to explain your personal circumstances clearly and obtain legal assistance.

2. Formalise the application

- Provide your personal details, religion, political affiliations and the reasons why you left your country, with an interpreter if necessary.

- Your biometric data will be collected (fingerprints and photograph), and your passport will be retained.

- Document any evidence of TNR in your possession, including messages, emails, screenshots, judicial proceedings and official communications. Bring it with you where possible.

3. After submitting the application

- Once your application has been registered, you should receive documentation confirming your status as an asylum seeker and, subsequently, a residence permit for asylum seekers allowing you to remain in Italy while your application is examined.

- As a general rule, asylum seekers may access the labour market after the waiting period prescribed by law, provided that the application is still pending. Ask a lawyer, a support organisation or the competent authorities to confirm the rules applicable to your situation.

4. Examination of the application

- The Territorial Commission for the Recognition of International Protection will examine your application.

- You may be invited to an interview, with an interpreter, to explain why you left your country and the risks you would face if returned.

- TNR, including persecution by the authorities of your country of origin through legal mechanisms, pressure on family members or cyberattacks, can and should be clearly described during the interview.

5. Decision on the application

- If your application is granted, you may receive refugee status, subsidiary protection or special protection.

- If your application is rejected, you may appeal the decision before the competent civil court.

Documenting your case

Documentation is important for your asylum application and your safety. It can also create risks. Gather information cautiously and, where possible, seek support.

What to collect

- Messages, emails, screenshots, links, metadata, administrative decisions, court documents and official communications connected with possible forms of TNR.
- Dates, times, platforms, senders, telephone numbers, usernames, URLs, locations and the names of any witnesses.
- Statements from people who witnessed threats or incidents, where it is safe to collect them.
- Original files and messages. Do not edit files, crop screenshots or delete original messages before seeking support, as metadata may be important.
- Where public documentation could create additional risks, consider documenting the case confidentially through a trusted organisation.

What to avoid

- Do not publish information about your case before assessing the possible consequences.
- Do not contact the authorities of your country of origin without preparation, legal advice or support.
- When contacting the Italian authorities, consider doing so with legal assistance or the support of a trusted organisation, especially if the case involves sensitive information, immigration status, foreign state actors or risks to family members abroad.
- Do not directly confront suspected perpetrators or people who may be acting on their behalf.
- Do not assume that institutions, including the Italian authorities, already understand TNR. You may need to explain the broader context.
- Do not share sensitive information through insecure channels.

3. Arrest or extradition request

If your country of origin has requested your extradition, or you have been arrested for reasons connected with TNR, act quickly by following these steps.

Do not sign anything without a lawyer

- If you are arrested, request a lawyer immediately. Do not sign any document before consulting legal counsel. You have the right to a lawyer, including a court-appointed lawyer where necessary.

- A lawyer is essential to challenge an unlawful or abusive extradition request.

Assessing the lawfulness of the request

- Extradition may be opposed where there are substantial grounds for believing that the person would face torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, political persecution, a flagrant denial of justice or other serious violations of fundamental rights in the requesting state.

- If you have applied for asylum or are already a beneficiary of international protection, inform your lawyer immediately. Any extradition request must be assessed in light of your protection application, your status and Italy's non-refoulement obligations.

- An extradition request linked to political activity, membership of an opposition movement, journalism, human rights work or criticism of the requesting state may constitute relevant grounds for opposing extradition, particularly where the request appears politically motivated or abusive.

Challenging the extradition request

- If the request is politically motivated, you may challenge it with the assistance of a specialised lawyer.

- The Court of Appeal will decide whether to grant or refuse the extradition request.

- If the Court of Appeal rules in favour of extradition, you have the right to appeal to the Court of Cassation.

Key contacts and legal framework

Italy currently has no specific legal definition of transnational repression and no dedicated institutional framework. Protection relies on existing criminal law, the asylum and international protection system, and general human rights safeguards. Civil society organisations can serve as important entry points for people seeking support.

Emergency and reporting contacts

Contact	Function
112	Single European emergency number: Police, Carabinieri, ambulance and fire brigade.
113	Italian State Police.
118	Medical emergency service.

Key institutions for TNR-related incidents

Institution	Relevant role
Questura / local police stations (commissariati)	Report threats, harassment and intimidation. Asylum applications must be lodged with the Immigration Office at the Questura.
Carabinieri	A general law-enforcement force. The Carabinieri can receive reports and criminal complaints (denunce and querele) and intervene in cases involving threats, intimidation, harassment, assault or other situations relevant to personal safety.
DIGOS	A specialised branch of the Italian State Police responsible for prevention and investigations concerning subversion, terrorism, politically motivated crime and threats to the democratic order. Relevant in cases of suspected interference by a foreign state.
Polizia Postale	A specialised branch of the Italian State Police responsible for preventing and combating cybercrime and threats carried out through digital networks and tools. Relevant in cases involving phishing, spyware, account compromise, online impersonation, doxing or other forms of digital abuse.
Public Prosecutor's Office (Procura della Repubblica)	File a report or criminal complaint (denuncia or querela), preferably with legal assistance.
Civil Court (Tribunale civile)	Appeal a decision rejecting an asylum application.
Court of Appeal (Corte d'Appello)	Challenge an extradition request.
Court of Cassation (Corte di cassazione)	Final appeal in extradition proceedings.

Current gaps in Italy's response to TNR

- No legal definition of TNR in Italian law: incidents may be investigated as specific criminal offences, such as threats, harassment or stalking, without being recognised as part of a coordinated pattern of repression.

- No dedicated interministerial coordination mechanism: law-enforcement agencies, public prosecutors, immigration authorities and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs do not have a shared protocol for TNR cases.

- No victim-centred reporting channel: there is no single body specifically equipped to address TNR. Civil society organisations help to fill this gap by supporting victims, documenting recurring patterns, facilitating referrals to appropriate services and promoting dialogue with institutions.

- Limited institutional awareness: not all law-enforcement officers, public prosecutors or judges are familiar with TNR. A lawyer with relevant expertise or a civil society organisation can help explain the context of your case.


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