

New Media Literacy Strategies to Counter Antisemitism

Workshop Report

November 2024

Executive Summary

"New Media Literacy Strategies to Counter Antisemitism – Workshop Report" provides a comprehensive overview of the event's objectives, findings, and recommendations. The initiative aims to address the rising tide of online antisemitism through the promotion of media literacy, multidisciplinary research, cross-sector cooperation, and tailored policy recommendations.

Key findings, particularly regarding the Italian context, include the dual nature of antisemitism as both a structured and pervasive phenomenon, amplified by disinformation linked to events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, and the 7 October terrorist attack. Workshop participants underscored the role of digital platforms in spreading antisemitism and emphasized the need for proactive strategies, such as pre-bunking, to combat the rapid spread of harmful narratives.

The report highlights critical challenges, including insufficient media literacy frameworks, the lack of consistent enforcement of digital policies, and the manipulation of online spaces through disinformation. It presents actionable recommendations spanning education, regulatory frameworks, and cross-sector cooperation, aiming to foster an inclusive and resilient digital ecosystem. The report concludes by emphasizing the importance of a multidisciplinary, holistic, and preventive approach to tackling online antisemitism and promoting societal cohesion.

Introduction to the Project

The project “New Media Literacy Strategies to Counter Antisemitism” is focused on the empowerment of relevant actors from various sectors, particularly at the local level, to develop and implement effective strategies against antisemitism and related phenomena, like hate speech, discrimination, and disinformation, targeting our society. Building on the successful EU-funded project, coordinated by FIDU, “Media Literacy for Democracy (MLFD)”, which emphasized the critical role of media literacy and the importance of cross-sectoral cooperation and a multidisciplinary approach, the project implemented a new set of activities, which included analysis, raising awareness, and advocacy, with the aim of enhancing and collecting efforts to address the evolving challenges of online antisemitism, while aligning with EU priorities. The initiative is funded through the Coalition to Counter Online Antisemitism (CCOA), via the Google.org Foundation. Antisemitism violates fundamental rights, especially the right to human dignity, the right to equality of treatment and the freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Antisemitism is no longer confined to extremist movements but has become deeply rooted in mainstream society, where it is increasingly normalized. ISD's analysis shows a significant rise in online antisemitism, with French content increasing seven-fold and German content over 13-fold between 2020 and 2021. Given the link between online activity and offline incidents, a holistic approach is essential to address this growing threat. Despite fragmented efforts by a small group of stakeholders, there is an urgent need for coordinated action and information sharing. The CCOA pilot project seeks to address these gaps by bringing together CSOs, governments, platforms, and private sectors to build a holistic, whole-of-society approach to combating antisemitism online, fostering collaboration across five key countries: Germany, France, Italy, Poland, and Sweden.

Overview on Online Antisemitism in Italy

The Annual Report on Antisemitism in Italy ¹published by the CDEC Foundation’s Observatory on Antisemitism reports a sharp increase in antisemitic incidents in 2023, with 454 cases compared to 241 in 2022, the highest number since data collection began. A significant spike followed the October 7 Hamas attacks – as also reported in the Dossier *Antisemitic Incidents After October 7, 2023*², by the Italian Secretariat of the National Coordinator for the Fight Against Antisemitism - and Israel’s subsequent response, showing the impact of geopolitical events on antisemitic hostility both online and offline. Specifically, 259 cases (e.g., defamation, insults, threats) of online incidents and 195 cases, including vandalism, physical assaults, and graffiti, of offline incidents have been recorded. Most incidents were concentrated in major cities like Rome (34), Milan (33), Florence (10), and Naples (9). Events such as the Hamas attacks, Pride marches, and Holocaust-related commemorations consistently led to spikes in antisemitic discourse. Among the main antisemitic narratives observed:

¹ Relazione annuale sull’antisemitismo in Italia nel 2023

<https://www.osservatorioantisemitismo.it/approfondimenti/relazione-annuale-sullantisemitismo-in-italia-2023-2/>

² Gli episodi di antisemitismo dopo il 7 ottobre 2023

https://www.senato.it/application/xmanager/projects/leg19/attachments/documento_evento_procedura_commissione/files/000/429/667/Dossier - Gli episodi di antisemitismo dopo il 7 ottobre 2023.pdf

- Persistent conspiracy theories portraying Jews as controllers of finance, politics, and media.
- Holocaust trivialization, denial, and inversion, with comparisons between Israel and Nazi Germany.
- Stereotypes such as Jews being associated with wealth and manipulation.

The rise of online hate speech has exacerbated these issues, with platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok hosting widespread antisemitic content, including calls for violence supported by AI-generated contents. Codified language and “algspeak,” such as using terms like "Austrian painter" to reference Hitler, make content moderation particularly challenging. In the digital sphere, this harmful content is further amplified by disinformation, which distorts facts and spreads fabricated narratives to justify and normalize antisemitic rhetoric and actions. In schools, antisemitism is also on the rise, manifesting in bullying, graffiti, and Holocaust denialist remarks, while TikTok influencers perpetuate antisemitic jokes and mockery, reaching large youth audiences. Geopolitical events, such as the Israel-Hamas conflict, further intensify antisemitism, fueling protests, public demonstrations, and hate speech during debates on the Middle East crisis. This growing normalization of antisemitism in both overt and covert forms, driven by social, political, and technological changes, underscores the urgent need for a comprehensive strategy to address hate speech, misinformation, disinformation, and societal biases targeting Jewish communities. The multifaceted nature of this phenomena creates an environment where antisemitic rhetoric and violence are perceived as acceptable. Addressing this complex interplay requires a comprehensive strategy that tackles the root causes of both antisemitism and disinformation while promoting effective policies including media literacy education, and enhancing systems for recording, reporting, and data collection.

As also highlighted by the Italian Senate's Extraordinary Commission against intolerance, racism, antisemitism and incitement to hatred and violence, in Italy critical gaps in addressing hate speech, particularly concerning its legal framework and enforcement mechanisms still persist. Despite the existence of provisions in articles 604-bis and 604-ter of the Italian Penal Code, which criminalize incitement to hatred based on race, ethnicity, and religion, significant challenges persist in prosecuting cases of online hate speech. The rapid spread of digital hate content and the anonymity of perpetrators hinder effective judicial responses, with over 80% of reported cases being dismissed. Antisemitism, in particular, continues to be a pervasive issue, often intertwined with conspiracy theories and historical prejudices, creating significant harm to Jewish communities and broader societal cohesion.

The Final Report of the National Strategy to Combat Antisemitism³ (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Technical working Group for the recognition of the definition of antisemitism approved by the IHRA - International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) emphasizes the resurgence of antisemitism in Italy and Europe, manifesting in both hate speech and physical violence. The report underscores the urgent need for a unified and coordinated response across political, educational, cultural, and judicial sectors. Anchored in the IHRA’s non-legally binding Working Definition of Antisemitism, the strategy aims to combat antisemitism through a multifaceted approach, focusing on education, awareness, legal measures, and partnerships with Jewish communities and civil society. It highlights the growing threats of

³ Strategia nazionale di lotta all'antisemitismo

https://www.senato.it/application/xmanager/projects/leg19/attachments/documento_evento_procedura_commissione/files/000/429/669/StrategiaNazionaleLottaAntisemitismo_def.pdf

online hate speech, Holocaust denial, anti-Zionism, and conspiracy theories, calling for stronger legislation and improved reporting mechanisms. The report advocates for enhanced collaboration among national and European institutions, Jewish organizations, and educators, as well as increased public awareness and Holocaust remembrance campaigns to effectively tackle antisemitism in all its forms.

Given these data and the associated challenges, the project underscores the importance of cross-sector cooperation and a multidisciplinary approach as its core methodology. By engaging diverse stakeholders, including policymakers, civil society leaders, journalists, and academics, the project fosters collaboration and ensures a holistic understanding of the complex interplay between antisemitism, hate speech, and disinformation. This integrated approach not only enhances the effectiveness of the strategies developed but also strengthens the collective capacity to address these challenges, contributing to a more inclusive and resilient society.

Workshop: Connecting Stakeholders to Counter Online Antisemitism

Findings and Analysis

The workshop served as a cornerstone activity of the project. Held in Rome on November 11, 2024, it took place at Europe Experience – David Sassoli, the multimedia center promoted by the European Parliament and the European Commission. The event brought together 16 participants, including Members of the Italian Parliament, prominent journalists, media literacy experts, representatives of the Italian Jewish community, academics, and civil society leaders. It focused on a comprehensive analysis of current antisemitic trends and the future challenges of the digital era, while identifying tailored media literacy strategies. The discussions were structured around two main sessions: *Trends in Antisemitism*, which examined the recent surge in hate speech and disinformation linked to current geopolitical events, including the October 7 terrorist attacks, and *Future Threats and Strategic Responses*, a strategic foresight exercise exploring future challenges, including AI-related risks and evolving social dynamics. The workshop revealed critical insights into the evolving nature of antisemitism and the challenges posed by disinformation in the digital age. Participants highlighted the dual manifestation of antisemitism as both a “solid” and “liquid” phenomenon. On one hand, antisemitism has grown more structured and institutionalized, infiltrating public spaces and formal discourse. On the other hand, its “liquid” nature is evident in the pervasive and often subtle spread of hate speech and disinformation online.

Events like the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, and the October 7 Hamas attacks have acted as accelerators of these trends, amplifying mis- and disinformation and fueling narratives that justify antisemitic attacks. For example, antisemitism has become central to the rhetoric of the Kremlin, particularly through the influence of Alexander Prokhanov, a Russian far-right ideologue. This rhetoric is often associated to conspiracy theories and falsehoods. With the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, antisemitism has increasingly been associated with anti-Western sentiments, particularly within the Italian media ecosystem. A key narrative emerging from the Israel-Hamas conflict,

as identified by the Italian Digital Media Observatory (IDMO)⁴, falsely claimed that Ukraine sold Western-supplied weapons to Hamas. This story was used to undermine support for Ukraine and sow distrust among its allies, showcasing common manipulation techniques. IDMO analysis⁵ also highlighted new methods for amplifying disinformation, such as the ability to self-identify as a verified user on X (formerly Twitter), allowing individuals to elevate unverified news. This manipulation includes the use of images from other conflicts, incitement to religious and racial hatred, and the promotion of fabricated stories about weapons, technologies, and false flag operations. These tactics distort narratives and undermine factual reporting. One of the ongoing projects at IDMO is the use of AI to help fact-checkers eliminate cultural biases, providing more accurate and neutral information. Moving forward, the strategy for combating disinformation emphasizes a proactive and preventive approach, such as pre-bunking strategies, in addition to traditional debunking efforts. This is crucial because once disinformation spreads online, controlling the narrative becomes nearly impossible.

A key theme discussed at the workshop was the role of disinformation as a tool for spreading antisemitism. Through media manipulation and fake news, disinformation fuels public emotions, especially fear and indignation, creating an environment where antisemitic narratives thrive. The normalization of these narratives, alongside systemic disinformation and media polarization, makes it more difficult to create effective counter-narratives. Participants emphasized that the rapid spread of disinformation on social media platforms makes traditional fact-checking measures insufficient, requiring innovative, proactive strategies to effectively address this challenge.

Challenges and Emerging Trends

The workshop also shed light on emerging challenges and vulnerabilities that hamper efforts to combat antisemitism and disinformation. A lack of media literacy and critical education exacerbates the problem, leaving media consumers unable to recognize or counter distorted content. This gap fosters passive citizenship, where individuals absorb harmful narratives without questioning their veracity or societal impact. Additionally, the increasingly subtle forms of antisemitism, as well as bias make detection and timely intervention more difficult. Sophisticated disinformation techniques further complicate these efforts. These methods are designed to exploit vulnerabilities in digital ecosystems, manipulating public perception and polarizing societies. The workshop identified the following main emerging challenges:

- **Disinformation as a Multifaceted Systemic Phenomenon:** Disinformation is difficult to track and count, especially when spread through fast-moving channels such as social

⁴ Centro di monitoraggio della misinformazione sulla guerra tra Israele e Hamas <https://www.idmo.it/2023/10/12/guerra-israele/>

⁵ La propaganda viaggia incontrollata su X <https://www.idmo.it/2023/09/26/x-musk/>
<https://www.idmo.it/2022/11/14/i-super-diffusori-di-disinformazione-su-twitter-hanno-visto-aumentare-il-proprio-engagement-dopo-lacquisto-del-social-media-da-parte-di-elon-musk/>

media and digital platforms like Telegram. Its rapid spread, makes mere fact-checking efforts ineffective.

- **Sophisticated Disinformation Techniques:** Disinformation techniques are often highly sophisticated, aiming to manipulate emotions like fear and indignation.
- **Polarization and Media Manipulation:** Media polarization, particularly through social platforms, fuels hate and intolerance, making it harder to create an effective counter-narrative.
- **Resistance to Critical Education:** The lack of media literacy in the population, with low awareness of the risks of disinformation, hate speech, and related phenomena, along with the absence of a systematic and multidisciplinary approach to digital education, makes citizens and the whole society more vulnerable.
- **Lack of Media Literacy Framework and Educator Training:** There is a significant challenge in Italy due to the lack of a structured framework for implementing media literacy strategies within educational contexts. The overall level of media knowledge is low, and educators often lack sufficient understanding of media tools, creating a gap in effective teaching. The absence of an intermediary figure between trainers and students able to fill that gap exacerbates this issue. This highlights the urgent need for a comprehensive training program for both educators and students to equip the new generation with the skills needed to navigate and engage with the complexities of media and disinformation.
- **Passive Citizenship Challenge:** A large portion of the population remains silent regarding these dynamics, absorbing distorted content and reinforcing antisemitic narratives.
- **Normalization of Antisemitism:** Antisemitism, which was once explicit, now often appears in more subtle forms, making it harder to recognize and address in a timely manner. This shift complicates intervention efforts, as behaviours that were once unchallenged have now become normalized or long ignored.
- **Return to violence:** Along with the new forms of antisemitism, violent attacks against Jews have been increasingly reported in several European countries after October 7th 2023.

Recommendations and Path Forward

To address these challenges, participants outlined the following key recommendations structured around three main pillars:

Education and Awareness

1. **Information and Media Literacy:** Introduce comprehensive multidisciplinary education programmes from a young age, focusing on recognizing and countering mis- and disinformation, as well as harmful content. Schools and media should position themselves as tools for critical education, fostering awareness and resilience against manipulative narratives.
2. **Formal Education and Teacher Training:** Implement national comprehensive training program for teachers and educators based on the IHRA definition of antisemitism. This program should be connected to existing initiatives on Holocaust remembrance and provide tools to address the trivialization and distortion of the Holocaust. Teacher training should also include theoretical and practical knowledge about biases and stereotypes, particularly implicit biases, and the tendency toward conspiracy thinking. Emphasize intercultural education and respect for diversity to combat stereotypes and prejudices among the young.
3. **Education for Active Citizenship and Community Engagement:** Promote participatory citizenship, encouraging individuals to actively recognize, report, and counter antisemitism and hate speech in all forms.

Proactive and Preventive Measures

4. **Proactive Strategies:** Develop proactive measures to counter mis- and disinformation before it spreads, leveraging technology and AI to identify and mitigate cultural biases.
5. **Cross-Sector Coordination:** Foster coordinated efforts between institutions, civil society, and media, to actively and effectively address the multifaceted nature of the online antisemitism.
6. **Inclusivity Policies:** Advocate for social and educational policies that create spaces for interaction and dialogue among diverse cultural and religious communities, preventing the raise of new forms of intolerance and reducing vulnerabilities.
7. **Engaging with Platforms:** Strengthen collaboration between CSOs and platforms to address systemic issues. This includes expanding trusted flagger schemes, improving victim support mechanisms, and integrating nuanced definitions of antisemitism, such as the IHRA working definition, into platform policies.

Policy and Regulatory Frameworks

8. **Strengthening National and EU Regulatory Frameworks:** Ensure consistent application of existing laws and establish guidelines for law enforcement and tech companies to identify and act against antisemitic content. Advocate for national and European regulatory approaches for different sizes of platforms (not only the VLPs), such as Telegram, where antisemitic content proliferates through larger

disinformation campaigns but doesn't reach the threshold for being appointed as VLOPs. In parallel, advocate for strengthening the effectiveness of the EU's Digital Services Act (DSA) to effectively hold platforms accountable. Additionally, support parliamentary proposals that encourage policy changes in social media platforms to ensure a uniform and efficient system for reporting and removing hate speech. This includes introducing financial penalties for platform operators who fail to comply with such regulations.

9. **Monitoring the Effectiveness of Policies:** Involve civil society organizations in monitoring the effectiveness of the regulatory policies by contributing to periodic reports that assess the impact of these measures on antisemitism and other forms of online hate. This can include gathering testimonies, data, and insights to track the progress of anti-discrimination efforts. Leveraging the expertise of those organisations specializing in AI-driven detection of harmful content and monitoring platforms' responsiveness to removing such content. This approach can draw on best practices established by the European Election Task Force under the Code of Practice on Disinformation, while adapting these strategies specifically to address antisemitic content.
10. **Improved Data Access and Transparency:** Advocate for greater data access from Platforms to allow civil society, academia, and the media to better understand the scale and nature of online antisemitism across different linguistic and cultural contexts.

Conclusion

The workshop highlighted the urgent need to address antisemitism as a contemporary and evolving issue that extends beyond its historical roots. Participants emphasized that a systematic, multidisciplinary approach is crucial in tackling this complex challenge, with coordinated efforts between institutions, media, and civil society playing a central role. A purely regulatory response is insufficient; instead, a comprehensive strategy that includes education, awareness-raising, and active civic participation is essential. The workshop underscored the critical importance of effectively regulating digital platforms, which continue to amplify antisemitism through disinformation and related phenomena. By adopting these recommendations, the project aims to build a more inclusive, informed, and resilient society capable of confronting the evolving threats posed by antisemitism in our society.

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