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# Hideandola

## WP2 - Focus Group Report

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## **Index**

### *Introduction*

*1. Methodology and research objectives (WP2)*

*2. Analysis of online focus groups: perceptions, interpretations, “typical acts” of the profession*

### *Conclusions*

### *Bibliography*

*Annex 1 (complete outline of focus group questions)*

*Annex 2 (general data and focus group calendar)*

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## Introduction

The debate on the complex relationship between the media and justice and how jurists perceive journalists and how information workers relate professionally to the law are fundamental questions that have to do with democratic participation in public life.

The media's relations with legal actors are often conflicting but complementary and contribute in different ways to the consolidation of a democracy or, conversely, may play a role in its failure. The complexity of this problematic relationship lies in the fact that politics, justice, economics and information are intrinsically interconnected with contemporary society and culture.

Journalism and the audiovisual media are not only one of the greatest technical and cultural inventions, but also represent a 'magic knot' that constantly renews itself to predict the future of man and his communication in relation to the transformations of legal and economic institutions and the information policies adopted by each individual state (Affaya, 2012).

And even if today information is implicated in all the power relations linked to its industrialisation, it is still the condition for opening up to a globalised world, which is certainly less compact, more frayed and fuller of paradoxes, even before the Covid-19 pandemic exploded in February 2020.

We are confronted with a new open and connected space of communication and information, but one that seems to be devoid of any social and legal norms, and this fuels 'incommunication', hinders confrontation and deepening, and rationalises and standardises diversity (Abruzzese 2015; Brennan 2016; Wolton 2021).

Given this, there is actually a complementarity between the journalistic and legal professions in establishing good democratic practices, regardless of their limitations and interests.

On the one hand, the media reveal the underbelly of power and make massive use of their ability to control and disseminate information; on the other hand, the judiciary applies the law and pronounces judgments according to the principles of law, supported at times by information flows (Muhlmann 2004; Affaya 2012; Wolton 2021).

Starting from this theoretical framework, the results of a second phase of analysis will be presented below, linked to the HIDEANDOLA project, which investigated the relationship between the media and justice, between journalists and jurists, in relation to hate crimes and their hidden forms, focusing mainly on anti-Semitism, the main subject of the research.

After a first phase of more theoretical work (the study of national and international literature on the topic of anti-Semitism) and then an analysis of the media content on the same topic, the project required the organisation of 7 focus groups, consisting of 8-10 participants, belonging to three different public categories: journalists, lawyers-judges and victims of anti-Semitic hatred[1].



## 1. Methodology and research objectives (WP2)

Considering the characteristics and aims of this project phase (WP2), from a methodological point of view, the focus group was chosen as the qualitative data collection tool.

The focus group is an unstructured group interview method through which it is possible to understand the specific needs of the final recipients of a project, or users of a service, starting from a representative sample of the latter, analysing in depth what people think beyond the superficial opinions they may have.

This type of methodology is built on the idea that by collecting people's different opinions and points of view and observing how participants interact within a group and change their initial opinions, it is possible to gather more information than through simple individual interviews (Corbetta, 2003).

The group interview is generally conducted by an expert whose task is to guide the entire discussion and stimulate participation.

In the specific case of HIDEANDOLA, the focus saw three researchers, sociologists and jurists from the universities involved in the project, in the role of moderators.

This choice was justified by the fact that some of the organised sessions included mixed meetings, i.e. with participants who were experts both in media and communication and in civil and criminal law. Interdisciplinarity immediately proved to be a necessary condition for investigating such a complex topic as hidden anti-Semitism, even though, at times, the dialogue between journalism and law encountered difficulties due to the different sensitivities of the actors involved, their expertise, and in particular professional jargon[2].

Considering the ongoing pandemic situation, which was already present when the project was written, the focus groups were conducted online, thus adopting computer-digital tools.

It was decided to use the Teams platform (Microsoft) as a discussion space both because it allows the organisers to quickly create the virtual room and the link to connect all participants, and because it has the 'record' function within it. Each session was in fact recorded solely for organisational purposes and to analyse the research material, with the consent of the journalists and lawyers involved.

The focus group had a twofold objective: on the one hand, to understand the perceptions and the level of awareness - knowledge of the justice and information operators related to the phenomenon of anti-Semitic hatred (and its hidden dimension) in Italy, analysing its media representation and presence in the courtrooms. On the other hand, an attempt was made to investigate the role of



journalistic and legal culture and education as useful elements to prevent and deal with any form of anti-Semitism in the public (digital) sphere.

For these reasons, the interviews, while not following a rigid structure, followed an outline, useful to the moderators in attempting to respond to the research objectives, with a series of questions that can be summarised in three macro-categories:

- *Perceptions*: definition of (hidden) anti-Semitism, profile presentation and level of involvement of the participant in the topic discussed, from a personal-professional point of view (a value on a scale from 1 to 10 was proposed);
- *Interpretations*: legal vs. journalistic language; influence of the media in the narration of cases of anti-Semitism; efficiency of currently existing legal regulations/instruments against hate phenomena;
- "*Typical acts of the profession*"[3]: journalistic-legal training and culture; responsibility of individuals and the profession.

The following analysis will follow precisely this thematic approach adopted for the construction of the online focus groups, reporting, and analysing the voices and thoughts of the interviewees.

## 2. Online Focus Group Analysis

The beginning of each session first included the presentation of the profile of the various participants (P) in which each person involved tried to indicate, with a score from 1 to 10, their 'closeness' to the phenomenon of anti-Semitism.

Most of the people who decided to take part in the research stated that they felt particularly close to the topic for three main reasons.

One of a 'biographical-affective' kind, because the participant himself is of Jewish origin or because he maintains significant relations with people of that religion; one of a 'professional' kind, this is the case of journalists or lawyers who have worked for a long time abroad (in Israel, in particular) or have had the opportunity to delve into the topic of anti-Semitism by reporting or following up on cases of hate crimes:

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*"I currently work in the foreign editorial staff and have written a lot about events related to the State of Israel (...) I therefore feel very close to the topic of anti-Semitism... from 1 to 10, I would say 8!" (P5)*

*"Rather than anti-Semitism, as I deal with crime and judicial news, I happened to follow some hate crime stories (...) Over time, however, I felt the need to delve into more specific topics such as anti-Semitic hatred, which presupposes a particular knowledge of history and the Jewish world" (P9)*

Finally, a type of 'educational' reason that in fact unites all the respondents in that in their student roles they all delved into the world wars and related violence against Jews before embarking on their careers.

It is therefore within the school world that one generally comes into contact for the first time with the "Jewish world" and the theme of anti-Semitism, even if addressed almost exclusively from a historical point of view, often linked to the figure of Anne Frank, with the risk of trivialising and personifying the traumatic event of the Shoah.

How this aspect became relevant for those journalists and jurists who found themselves, during their professional experience, reporting on or investigating anti-Semitism will be highlighted later on, just as the importance of school education and the study of the world wars in the twentieth century will re-emerge several times in the course of the research.

It is also important to highlight how, from the very first minutes of the interview, in spite of the interest shown in the topic of the focus, both journalists and jurists repeatedly acknowledged their difficulty in dealing with the topic of anti-Semitism, underlining how it is very little present in the Italian public debate.

Some interviewees also expressed their opinions on this issue:

*"It is necessary to talk about it in schools and in the media (...) no longer limiting ourselves to remembering and talking about racism or the Shoah only on the occasion of 'world days' or the celebration of important historical and institutional anniversaries such as the Day of Remembrance" (P1)*

*"We are facing important political and cultural changes, the question of anti-Semitism is also a problem of our time (...) Fortunately, we still have the voices of the survivors of the Shoah that help us not to forget the horrors of Nazism, but today they seem not to be enough" (P5)*

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*"Unlike the courtroom, or other institutional places, where this issue is little addressed, the media are full of episodes of hatred, including anti-Semitic hatred (...) it is in Italian journalism that I notice a certain disinterest, a certain inattention (...) in general little sensitivity towards anti-Semitic hatred and the events that concern Jewish communities" (P10)*

The professional category of lawyers, likewise that of journalists, is highly critical of how journalistic, political, and institutional communication deals with violence against Jews. Media professionals admit that they often find themselves reporting on facts of anti-Semitism but are unable to go any further because they are hindered by the economic and organisational logic of the media. The speed of information and the need to disseminate constantly updated media content often prevent a clear investigation of complex events of this nature that very often conceal a symbolic-cultural and religious dimension and are therefore not easy to narrate and interpret. Certainly, the subject of anti-Semitism has existed for some time, it affects contemporary society, it emerges powerfully in virtual environments and in the media, but less so in scholastic and legal institutions where it is dealt with too superficially, with too much fear or with excessive references to the historical past that ghettoise Remembrance and hinder the recognition of those 'more hidden' forms of anti-Semitic hatred. A difficulty probably fuelled by a 'basic literacy', to borrow the expression used by one participant of a historical-linguistic kind:

*"At this moment in history, I believe we are faced with a trivialisation of the Shoah. To describe it, we use expressions that have become clichés and that also indicate other issues or have other meanings such as "Absolute Evil", "saving Memory, "not forgetting" etc. (...) (P3)*

*"Working in a news agency I realised, especially working with interns that there is a lot of historical and linguistic confusion about what we mean by 'Holocaust "Shoah", on the importance today of the testimony of survivors (...) I am faced with simplifications within articles that damage historical communication and the remembrance of this tragedy through the media (...) perhaps there is a loss of Memory, more than anything else" (P.8)*

## Part 1. Perceptions

The first part of the discussion, within the various focus group sessions, concerned the meaning of the term "anti-Semitism" and its public perception.

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In particular, the formulation of a 'new' definition of what is the main aim of the HIDEANDOLA project, namely Hidden Antisemitism, a hybrid antisemitism, hidden in contemporary communicative and relational forms.

The operational, non-legally binding, but institutionally recognised definition of 'anti-Semitism' is that proposed by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA, 2016) describes the phenomenon as:

*"(...) a certain perception of Jews, which can be expressed as hatred of Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of anti-Semitism directed towards Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, Jewish community institutions and religious structures" [4].*

Parallel to the proposed definition, the IHRA also provides some useful information to reduce certain commonplaces on the subject or distortions, doubts that also emerged in the discussion with the focus group participants.

In the first part of the focus groups, in fact, although in a fragmented and confused manner, much of this emerged from the words of the journalists and jurists, both regarding the definition of anti-Semitism and its hidden nature that characterises the contemporary world:

*"As a definition to adhere to there is the one, for example, from the IHRA of 2016, which is a good starting point (...) Surely anti-Semitism is a form of political and cultural hatred that manifests itself in violence (...) the 'narrative' hatred, perhaps, in my opinion is the most insidious because it is less visible. I am talking about the desire to narrate the Jewish world using stereotypes for very specific ideological purposes that have important social effects' (P6)*

*"We are talking about a violent phenomenon against a subject of the Jewish religion, linked to the State of Israel. So, it is about being Jewish (...) There is a link between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism (...) In history, persecutions against the Jewish people occurred because they did not have their own identity and their own State in which to recognise themselves' (P16)*

*"...anti-Semitism in my opinion has to do with religion and religious practices first of all. (...) then it definitely has a hidden dimension that lives in the symbols, in the words and perceptions of people who do not know Jewish culture or Israel, but who construct narrative frames about 'dangerous Jews'...so, hearsay, with references to conspiracy theories, such as ethnic substitution and defence of the white race (...) That is why I believe that anti-Semitism is also a form of racism" (P31)*

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*"Anti-Semitism has several dimensions: the historical one represented by the Shoah, the political one linked to the question of Israel, and the religious-cultural one, think of all the ancient and modern conflicts towards Christians and Islam (...) The contemporary French exodus is a clear case of a malaise of the Jewish communities" (P23)*

It is first possible to deduce *three fundamental aspects* of the definition-perception of anti-Semitism from the words reported.

A *first element* concerns the awareness on the part of some of the participants of the existence of more recent definitions of the phenomenon approved at the level that help from a cultural and legal point of view to draw the boundaries for recognising and condemning an anti-Semitic act among other existing forms of ethnic-political hatred.

A *second point* has to do with the still open debate between anti-Semitism and anti-Semitism.

A *third aspect* is related to the themes of racism and the anti-Semitic conspiracy, with reference to its 'hidden' dimension, traceable not only in contemporary public debate, but also in much scientific literature, starting with Poliakov's (1980) studies on the Jewish genocide, according to which the Jew has always been a demonised individual, accused of embodying the 'demonic principle'.

Anti-Semitism, therefore, manifests itself through various modes of stigmatisation.

From physical aggression and systematic persecution to what we might call, quoting sociologist Adorno, 'symbolic exclusion' (malicious rumours, insults, calls to hatred, ideological discourse not necessarily linked to political discourse) perhaps the most widespread in the age of hyper-communication.

Its hidden dimension has to do with the fluid state of this form of hatred. In addition to what is said, however, the level of awareness of the speaker, of the one who perceives Jews in a certain way, is also relevant.

Hidden anti-Semitism thus seems to consist of a form of contemporary symbolic violence that is 'narrated', but in an unconscious manner.

In the words of some interviewees:

*"The idea of a hidden anti-Semitism I think has to do with what is told against the Jewish people, often in support of the Nazi extermination" (P15)*

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*"It is the misinformation about the Shoah or Israel made in social media (...) The fact that the gas chambers did not exist, or that there was no genocide (...) this is denying one reality a truth, telling another one concerning with other victims and other perpetrators" (P29)*

*"He who still today discriminates and uses against the Jew commonplaces linked to wealth, to the shape of his nose, is an ignorant person (...) the serious Fact that fuels hatred today, not only actions and words, but the level of unconsciousness of using certain words or behaving in a certain way towards the Other" (P35)*

There is thus a paranoid view of the Jewish people where religion, culture and Israel are only the visible tip of a 'pyramid of anti-Semitic hatred', whose submerged, therefore barely visible, part represents the contemporary metamorphosis of hidden anti-Semitism.

**Tab.1 Definitions of anti-Semitism (emerged in FGs)**

<i>Typologies</i>	<i>Antisemitism as. ...</i>
<p><i>institutionally recognised</i></p> <p><i>anti-Semitism and/or anti-Zionism</i></p> <p><i>"hidden" / "narrative"</i></p>	<p>-a certain perception of Jews, which can be expressed as hatred of Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations towards Jewish community institutions and religious structures (IHRA,2016)</p> <p>- Religious hatred vs. political hatred (the Jewish people without an identity in search of a state)</p> <p>- form of cultural prejudice fuelled by ignorance</p> <p>- set of anti-Semitic theses that still survive in a fragmented and mythological manner in the form of anti-Jewish narratives, ancient images, fears and prejudices shared in the public sphere, firmly rooted in the collective mindset (denialism/conspiracy)</p>



## Part 2. Interpretations

The second part of the focus group investigated the relationship between the media and justice, putting the figure of journalists and jurists in the foreground and trying to understand the role of justice information in the face of anti-Semitic hate cases.

In particular, the discussion looked at two issues:

- 1) *the media agenda* (reporting of hate crimes in traditional and digital media) and the possible connection between media and legal language.
- 2) *the communication and strategies adopted by lawyers and judges* in relation to anti-Semitic events and the (in)efficiency of the regulations currently in force in Italy to combat contemporary forms of hatred.

Issues that fully interested the two professional categories even in the absence of specific knowledge of the topic or in the absence of direct biographical-professional experience related to episodes of hate crimes.

In general, some common considerations emerge from the interviewees.

One of these concerns the low presence of anti-Semitic episodes on the Italian media agenda.

When reported, incidents of anti-Semitic hate crimes generally coincide with the approach of historically important dates for Italian political history and institutions: 27 January, Memorial Day, or 25 April, Liberation Day.

According to some interviewees:

*"It seems that things have remained frozen there (reference to the Shoah). Despite the yearly celebrations, on 27 January we witness violent episodes or shameful discussions on social networks and newspapers (...) more than hidden anti-Semitism I would speak of an old anti-Semitism 'frozen' in the present that the media, however, do not help to remove"* (P7)

*"The world of the media tends to reduce the Holocaust to a serious fact, which certainly happened, but belongs to the past, therefore now closed (...) The Shoah is presented today exclusively as an ethical-moral issue, without historical value. Therefore it is spoken of at alternating times, in an erroneous and disorganised manner"* (P17)



*"The only real wealth today are the witnesses of the Shoah (..) In time I believe we will lose Memory (..) Not all schools are equally committed to this subject, the speed of information and coverage of the same events after a while confuses and tires people" (P33)*

In the absence of precise historical-temporal references, the narrative of anti-Semitic hatred reported by the media seems to be uniform.

The absence of details and in-depth investigations prevents the community from forming a correct opinion on criminal events, the work of the judicial bodies, and the psycho-physical condition of the victims and attackers.

In journalistic practice, in fact, unlike judicial practice, with reference to crime news, deviant episodes such as assaults, defamation, blackmail, are rarely distinguished from serious cases of discrimination, which are often manipulated, trivialised or politically instrumentalised:

*"In the first case (aggression, blackmail) the news appears 'clear', it leaves a trace in the public debate. Discrimination, which I would call 'creeping', such as that against Jews, on the other hand, does not. These are attitudes that are underreported, under-reported, or simply placed within general narrative categories, such as 'racism' or 'returning fascism', which in the absence of further information are difficult for the viewer to interpret (P14).*

In the narration of such facts, however, it is necessary to respect the rights of those involved, so that the public's opinion is formed on news that adheres to the actual trial results.

The issue becomes more complicated if one considers that not everything that is dealt with in the media space is relevant for criminal justice, just as not all forms of anti-Semitism that are publicly discussed are then dealt with in courtrooms:

*"In the Italian courts, very few trials related to cases of anti-Semitism are addressed or follow a full judicial process" (P30).*

*"The perception is that what is considered 'anti-Semitism' at the criminal level emerges more in the media (...) the European Court, for example, has a very strict attitude towards forms of denialism, in particular of the Shoah. Denialist speech, more than hate speech in general, concretises an abuse of the right (...) it is not possible to consider it 'freedom of expression', as it is not protected by Article 10 of the Convention on Human Rights (...) This point, the space of freedom of expression, is rather criticised in Italy even by many progressive doctrinal voices' (P15)*

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*"I was a victim of hate on Twitter (...) I denounced it, but nothing happened (...) the verbal violence against me continued. It is difficult to intervene in the virtual, just as it is complicated to consider certain symbolic acts a crime to be condemned (...) the fascist salute for example" (P31)*

With respect to the identification and narration of instances of anti-Semitic hatred (related to freedom of expression) Italian criminal law has limitations related to the principle of taxativity and determinacy. Therefore, not all forms of anti-Semitism or discrimination can be considered criminal with respect to what is socially perceived, and media represented (Sammarco, 2019)

It is precisely for this reason that it is important for the media to show a responsible attitude when the news is being constructed, so that there are no situations of violence or the use of the topic 'Judaism' or 'anti-Semitism' as propaganda topics during election campaigns:

*"The complexity of the topic 'anti-Semitism' requires us journalists not to construct contrived cases of violence and not to include detailed information that has perhaps yet to be ascertained so as not to construct parallel realities and feed disinformation" (P4)*

*'Considering the course of the current Italian election campaign, it is truly chilling to see how the exponents of the various Italian parties try to attract the attention of the local Jewish communities starting with the choice of the date of the vote, 25 September, the day of the Jewish New Year' (P31)*

Another aspect that emerged within the various focus groups again concerns the confusion between the terms 'anti-Semitism', 'anti-Zionism' and events involving the State of Israel.

This time, however, related not so much to common perception or their definitions, but to the work of information workers.

As partly already mentioned, the debate between these two concepts also takes place within the field of journalism:

*"For those who do information, and especially cover foreign affairs, distinguishing between anti-Semitism, anti-Zionism and Israel policy is crucial (...) it is an act of responsibility. We speak on the one hand of identity, on the other of politics (...) it is the journalist who must be able to steer the discourse on the Jewish issue in the right direction, without playing dirty with the excuse of speed of information" (P19)*

*"The journalist must avoid misunderstandings and strange identifications (...) Very often those who judge the actions of a Jewish community are publicly labelled as those who are against Israel, or*



*those who criticise Israel's policies automatically hate Jews, and are therefore accused of anti-Semitism" (P16)*

*"Journalism has the power to define social reality (...) there is in Italy no correct perception of either the number of Jews living there or the number of cases of anti-Semitism. This is simply because in the media it is the State of Israel that makes the headlines, rarely are Jewish communities at the centre of the facts being told' (P24).*

The phenomena of hatred and anti-Semitism growing within the media landscape feed on the logic of the media, exploiting the persuasive mechanisms generated by infotainment, the invasion of spectacle/entertainment into the space of information (or vice versa). A process that has transformed the coverage of real events (a characteristic element of journalism) into an increasingly less journalistic exclusive, leading to the triumph of reality TV and the reality show (Sorrentino 2008; Faloppa 2020).

The problem discussed is amplified or minimised, circumscribing it within a specific situation without going beyond it, avoiding any historical, religious, or political connection (in the case under consideration):

*"I believe there are two forms of journalism in relation to anti-Semitism, that relating to Judaism which speaks only in January to remember the victims of the Holocaust, and a more political journalism which approaches the Arab-Israeli conflict as the clash between David and Goliath" (P37)*

*"Cases of anti-Semitism, in addition to being under-represented in the media, are presented as isolated cases (...) No Italian newspaper has ever done an investigation into how the Jewish communities in Italy live and their state of security (...) They feel bad, there is a continuous, incessant exodus from Europe to Israel of Jews who no longer feel protected (...) But I have not read any headlines about this" (P13)*

The lack of journalistic knowledge and 'distant' reporting of Jewish culture and community life not only risks reinforcing already widespread prejudices and generalisations, but also fuels a problem of security and civil coexistence:

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*"Many indigenous people do not know why passing in front of a synagogue they see army trucks parked both day and night. We are talking about armoured areas (...) This condition creates a sense of anxiety in the population, affects local dialogue and makes the Jew appear as a threat and a target at the same time (...) this must not become a habit, but more a testimony to anti-Semitism" (P25)*

The public that reads or listens to a news story of international importance may not understand what is being reported in a few minutes. Just as for a generalist journalist, who deals with multiple topics, the superficial use of terminology on sensitive issues or those that require prior knowledge, such as religious-cultural or geopolitical issues, could result in a lack of responsibility or in the most serious cases a violation of the code of ethics:

*"As a correspondent from Jerusalem, I realised that to speak of the Holy Land to indicate a certain area, or a specific part of the country, one risks being taken back by colleagues or even being accused of being a supporter of anti-Semitic thought (...) In some areas of the world terminologies such as check point, "conflict" anti-Semitism have to be 'weighed' "(P23)*

*"In journalism one very often searches for various terms in order not to repeat oneself in an article or TV report. But this is an exercise that cannot be improvised or common sense (...) it must arise from a personal deepening of certain themes or from an education in journalistic sectorial language, in this case to report facts related to international scenarios" (P14)*

Media coverage of Judaism seems to be rather scarce, underestimated, at times dangerous, but this is also due to the many nuances that this culture presents, starting from its historical-religious dimension.

It is the references to the Shoah that prevail in media accounts or in cases of hate crime.

Updating training on the subject, in journalism and law, becomes at this point the problem and the solution at the same time in Italy.

**Tab.2 Media, justice and anti-Semitism**

<i>Journalistic point of view</i>	<i>Legal point of view</i>
<p>Little in-depth study of the Holocaust, reduced to a past historical event</p> <p>Episodes of anti-Semitic hatred presented as isolated cases - difficulty in registering the sense of insecurity of Jewish communities</p> <p>Lack of attention to the use of specific language when reporting news about Israel/Jewish culture</p> <p>The news reported is more about Israel than cases of anti-Semitism</p> <p>Cultural vs. political journalism</p>	<p>Cases of anti-Semitism reported in the media appear to be more numerous than those dealt with in courtrooms</p> <p>Freedom of expression vs hate speech (denialism)</p> <p>Weak/insufficient regulations against hate crimes, especially if they occur within digital environments</p> <p>Difficulties in technical-legal intervention in digital hate crime cases</p>

*Part 3. Typical acts of the professions*

In Italy, lawyers and journalists are two professions that require registration with their own Order, a collective body representing a particular professional category.

The regulations of the individual Orders require journalists and lawyers to obtain a specific number of training credits each year. This means that in both cases the two professionals must fulfil the obligation of Continuing Professional Education (CFP)[5].

As already emerged in the second part of the focus groups, the difficulty in narrating or judging hate crimes, especially if anti-Semitic, also seems to derive from the cultural and educational gaps



present within the individual professional paths or in the curriculum of the professionals interviewed themselves.

In the last part of the focus groups, therefore, there is a full awareness on the part of the professionals of what are the strengths and weaknesses on a personal-professional level, and those related to their own category, when it comes to the Jewish world:

*"We have to admit that we know very little about the Jewish world (...) when dealing with certain issues one focuses almost exclusively on the technical aspects of one's profession, losing sight of the complexity of the case one has before one" (P8)*

*"Lawyer or journalist, it is first of all necessary to start again from the fundamentals of Judaism (...) to start again, for example, from the distinction between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism within the training courses, avoiding tribalism and partisanship, but looking at history" (P25)*

*"It is necessary to inform oneself by referring to several different sources (...) The risk of confusion or manipulation of reality is always possible in mediated communication" (P34)*

Once again, the logics of information impose, especially on journalists, the interest of their target audience, the quantity and pace of news (Sorrentino, Bianda 2013).

Thus, when faced with the choice of whether to report or give more prominence to a news story about a 'swastika in a school wall' or a 'defaced Jewish cemetery', the choice will almost certainly fall on the latter:

*"Needless to hide it what we have to consider are the journalistic mechanisms (...) the sale of copies, the debate that is polarised (...) the swastika on a school wall does not make the news like a daubed Jewish cemetery" (P.27)*

*"One should also ask oneself: who is interested in that news? or in the deepening of it? (..) It is clear that in general one follows the interest of the public" (P.15)*

There is therefore also a question of professional responsibility, a key concept present in all professional orders and courses.

One interviewee emphasises:



*"Think about migration (...) a lot of work has been done to eliminate expressions such as 'vu cumprà', 'invasion' ... despite all the training and linguistic 'battles', there are still people who use them daily" (P12)*

Two dimensions could prove useful in overcoming the cultural obstacles described, if addressed by considering three key points suggested by the journalists and lawyers interviewed themselves.

*The first term' is that of "school", understood as a formative space useful for building the individual's knowledge and conscience in useful times, starting with the correct use of language (Freire, 1973).*

As stated by several participants:

*"I have worked for a long time with the world of schooling and teaching (...)I have been able to see how there is an urgent need to take the best care of the use of words both in communication between children, between teachers and students, but also within the textbooks adopted for the study of history" (P21)*

*"Regulations and news are communicated with words... we must learn to use and interpret them correctly from a very young age. Telling facts, history ... is the task first of the school and then of the university, which are the cultural institutions that support the formation of the individual" (P9).*

*The second concept has to do with "dialogue", with a dual interpretation.*

On the one hand, the need emerged to build training courses on the subject of anti-Semitism, possibly free from the logic of achieving training credits to avoid the 'forced' and passive participation of lawyers and journalists, but held by experts in intercultural and religious dialogue, i.e. figures from outside the world of information or law, much more sensitive to the subject, with a high capacity for listening and communication, beyond prejudice:

*"First of all, we need a clear commitment on the part of the Order to organise ad hoc courses on anti-Semitism, just as we need interest and humility on our part (...) I do not consider training run only by colleagues who have sporadic experience in the field to be very useful, but we need external help from experts in inter-religious dialogue, theologians, etc."(P27)*

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*“In cooperation with regional institutions and representatives of local Jewish communities themselves, journalists and lawyers together could learn not only theory, but also have a more practical type of experience such as visiting Italian synagogues or memorials” (P24)*

On the other hand, it was quite interesting to record how, faced with the challenge of understanding anti-Semitism and its 'hidden' dimension, journalists and lawyers declared that “they need each other”, constant dialogue and confrontation in building a solid common training path:

*“I find the dialogue between media and justice very useful. Learning the language of criminal law would be a real advantage for those trainees who as soon as they arrive at the editorial office and are sent to courtrooms without experience then find it very difficult to translate what has happened into journalistic communication” (P5)*

*“Actors of law, or even law enforcement very often are not clear when communicating publicly (...) Especially during press conferences in dealing with the media the possibility of not fully understanding each other is rather high” (P30)*

*“It is necessary to communicate and enforce laws. Knowledge of the law and the application of good communication help to understand and investigate even complex phenomena” (P26)*

The third aspect concerns the “counter-narrative”:

*“Anti-Zionism, anti-Semitism...are words that take on a political meaning in the media, linked above all to what happens in the State of Israel (...) But in addition to recounting the conflicts, the alleged conspiracies, remaining stuck in the usual inaccurate narratives that stiffen the way of recounting certain themes, it would be useful to broaden the public's knowledge about these places (...) Talking about Israel is all very well, but also with respect to its potential in terms of technological innovation, green policies (...) Not only geopolitical or military issues” (P20)*

*“When we talk about Jews, they are described as very numerous in Italy and as a self-centred population, in that rich Jews only help Jews in difficulty (...) The perception is wrong, we must change the narrative (...) There are only 30,000 Jews in Italy and solidarity, as in all other religious communities, is done at all levels and towards everyone, just as it happens in Christian communities, etc...” (P35)*

In this sense, enriching a story or proposing a critical and “unpublished” version on the same theme would help to define and understand more correctly certain scenarios unknown to the Italian media public.

In the scenario of widespread (in)suffering exacerbated by misinformation and poor education, the construction of 'counter narratives' could offer a thin thread of sociality and collective reflection to demystify the current discourse.

Behind it, in fact, are often hidden toxic narratives that impregnate our reality, pollute political debate and human relations, spread prejudices and commonplaces, exacerbate social divisions and risk stifling the need for culture and education that are the roots even of disciplines, apparently so different, such as journalism and law.

**Tab.3 Journalistic and legal culture and education**

<i>Journalism</i>	<i>Law</i>
Need for dialogue between disciplines	Need for dialogue between disciplines
Acquiring the fundamentals of Jewish history and culture at school	Acquiring the fundamentals of Jewish history and culture at school
Incorporating specialised modules on anti-Semitism conducted by experts on religious-intercultural topics into their CFP	Incorporating specialised modules on anti-Semitism conducted by experts on religious-intercultural topics into their CFP
Translating penal language into journalistic communication	Controlling media logics through the correct use of penal categories in factual reporting -Reinforcing techno-legal tools for online crimes



## Conclusions

The second analysis phase of the HIDEANDOLA project required the organisation of 7 focus groups, composed of three different categories of audience: journalists, lawyers-judges and victims of anti-Semitic hatred.

Although not following a rigid structure, an outline was created, useful for the moderators to attempt to answer the research objectives, with a series of questions that can be summarised in three macro-categories.

In schematic form, the main results that emerged described in the previous paragraphs are summarised below:

### *1. Perceptions*

- Ø Journalists and lawyers believe that anti-Semitism concerns a certain perception of Jews, which can be expressed as hatred of Jews. A hatred that has two dimensions the political and the religious (referring to the idea of the Jewish people as a community without identity in search of a state).
- Ø Hidden anti-Semitism refers to the set of anti-Semitic theses that still survive today in a fragmented and mythological manner in the form of anti-Jewish narratives, ancient images, fears and prejudices shared in the public sphere, firmly rooted in the collective mentality (denialism/conspiracy)

### *2. Interpretations*

- Journalists:

- Ø There is little in-depth coverage of the Holocaust, often reduced to a past historical event within the media landscape
- Ø Episodes of anti-Semitic hatred are journalistically presented as isolated cases. There is therefore a difficulty in registering the Jewish communities' sense of insecurity and getting to know their culture closely



- Ø There is little attention to the use of specific language when reporting on Israel/Jewish culture
- Ø The news reported concerns more Israeli political and institutional events than cases of anti-Semitism occurring in Italy

#### - Jurists:

- Ø Cases of anti-Semitism reported in the media seem to be more numerous than those dealt with in courtrooms
- Ø Denialist speech, more than general hate speech, concretizes an abuse of the right (..) it is not possible to consider it as 'freedom of expression', as it is not protected by Article 10 of the Convention on Human Rights.
- Ø There are regulations to counter hate crime and hate speech. When dealing with concrete incidents, these appear to be weak regulations against hate crimes, especially if they occur within digital environments.

#### 3. "Typical Acts" of the profession

- Ø The need for a dialogue between journalism and law emerges
- Ø For those interviewed, it is important to acquire the fundamentals of Jewish history and culture from school, and then to study the same topics in depth in courses recognised by their profession
- Ø Within their own CDFs there are not always specialist modules on anti-Semitism conducted by experts on religious-intercultural topics
- Ø When communicating anti-Semitism, it is essential to check sources and control media logic through the correct use of legal language and penal categories when reporting facts

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Ø The language of law may be complex to the media audience. It is suggested that journalists translate expressions related to criminal law and references to legislation into journalistic jargon



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## Annex 1 - Complete outline of focus group questions (Language: Italian)

### “Percezioni”

- Definizione di antisemitismo e la sua dimensione nascosta oggi  
(Come definirebbe l'antisemitismo? Conosce la differenza tra antisemitismo e antisionismo? Cosa distingue un atto antisemita dalle altre forme di odio e violenza?)
- Percezione dell'antisemitismo e del fenomeno dell'odio nella realtà sociale e mediale  
(I numerosi fenomeni di odio che vengono riportati nei media sono effettivamente riscontrabili nella realtà sociale o sono il risultato di processi di *emotainment* e/o *infotainment*?)
- Dimensione storico-culturale vs politica-complottista dell'antisemitismo  
(Nel dibattito giornalistico e giuridico attuale sul tema dell'antisemitismo prevale più la sua dimensione storica - cultura o questa viene “schiacciata” dall'inciviltà politica e dalle narrazioni complottistiche?)
- Under-* o *over reporting*: secondo lei, il fenomeno dell'antisemitismo, per come riportato dai media, appare più esteso, o più ridotto, rispetto a quello effettivamente intercettato da, o comunque di potenziale interesse per, il sistema della giustizia penale?

### “Interpretazioni”

- Riflessione sull' intreccio tra agende dei media tradizionali e digitali– “ritualità”  
(Secondo Lei come vengono riportate notizie sul tema dell'antisemitismo nei vari mezzi di comunicazione? Nota delle differenze tra il racconto nei media tradizionali e in quelli digitali?)
- Riflessione sull'intreccio tra linguaggio mediatico e giuridico: secondo lei, l'utilizzo di un lessico che rimanda a categorie penalistiche (crimine, pena, vittima, ecc.) per descrivere sui media casi di asserito antisemitismo, è di solito pertinente? Nota un abuso di questi termini, o al contrario una eccessiva cautela al riguardo? Quali logiche o strategie possono a suo parere celarsi dietro le modalità di ricorso a tale lessico?

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-Riflessione sull'esposizione mediatica degli attori della giustizia penale: secondo lei, come operano magistrati ed avvocati sul piano comunicativo, in rapporto a vicende di antisemitismo? I loro interventi sono eccessivi, o troppo sporadici? Opportuni, ed efficaci, anche allo scopo di favorire l'elaborazione, da parte dell'opinione pubblica, di antidoti culturali al fenomeno? Vede rischi di distorsioni rispetto ai canoni del giusto processo e al buon andamento della giustizia penale?

-Le normative attualmente presenti in Italia e in Europa, o comunque le strategie degli agenti della giustizia penale (forze di polizia, pubblici ministeri, giudici) sono inefficaci o (in)sufficienti a contrastare le forme di odio antisemita? Vi sono dei particolari limiti? Che cosa può essere migliorato? Qual'è il vostro rapporto con le fonti?

## *“Atti tipici” della professione*

-Cultura giornalistica e giuridica vs responsabilità dei singoli

(Dalla attuale letteratura sul tema emerge uno scenario critico quando si parla di episodi antisemitismo, del popolo ebraico e della sua storia. Odio e disinformazione sembrano caratterizzare l'attuale dibattito pubblico. Quanto giornalisti, magistrati e avvocati, come categorie professionali in grado di agire sulla realtà, sono “responsabili” di questo? Quanto invece è responsabilità dei singoli?)

-Ruolo del giornalista e del magistrato o avvocato di fronte ai casi di crimini d'odio.

(Cosa stanno facendo e cosa possono ancora fare avvocati e giornalisti per contrastare i fenomeni di odio? Quali sono i punti di forza e di debolezza delle singole professioni? Quale tipo di interazione tra giornalisti e professionisti della giustizia penale potrebbe essere auspicabile, sul piano comunicativo?)

-Per quanto riguarda la conoscenza e la formazione di avvocati e giornalisti sul fenomeno dell'antisemitismo e delle varie forme di odio contemporaneo, quali sono secondo Lei gli aspetti oggi da approfondire maggiormente? Che cosa manca nel percorso formativo, e quali sono le principali difficoltà finora riscontrate nel suo lavoro quando si trova a raccontare/affrontare casi di antisemitismo?

## Annex 2 - General data and focus group calendar

1.

Date and time of start - end of interview: 27/07/2022      4.00-6.00 pm
Platform used: Microsoft Teams
Professional category interviewed: Lawyers, Judges e Journalists
Number of participants: 8
Researcher/Interviewer name: Letizia Materassi, Giacomo Buoncompagni, Elettra Stradella, Federica Merenda

2.

Date and time of start - end of interview: 26/08/2022      4.00-6.00 pm
Platform used: Microsoft Teams
Professional category interviewed: Journalists
Number of participants: 10
Researcher/Interviewer name: Letizia Materassi, Giacomo Buoncompagni, Nicolò Amore



3.

Date and time of start - end of interview: 08/09/2022      4.00-6.00 pm
Platform used: Microsoft Teams
Professional category interviewed: Lawyers, Judges, Journalists
Number of participants: 8
Researcher/Interviewer name: Letizia Materassi, Giacomo Buoncompagni, Nicolò Amore

4.

Date and time of start - end of interview: 09/09/2022      4.00-6.00 pm
Platform used: Microsoft Teams
Professional category interviewed: Lawyers e Judges
Number of participants: 7
Researcher/Interviewer name: Silvia Pezzoli, Giacomo Buoncompagni, Nicolò Amore



5.

Date and time of start - end of interview: 12/09/2022      4.00-6.00 pm
Platform used: Microsoft Teams
Professional category interviewed: Lawyers e Judges
Number of participants: 7
Researcher/Interviewer name: Silvia Pezzoli, Giacomo Buoncompagni, Elettra Stradella, Domenico Notaro

6.

Date and time of start - end of interview: 21/09/2022      4.30-6.30 pm
Platform used: Microsoft Teams
Professional category interviewed: Journalists
Number of participants: 10
Researcher/Interviewer name: Letizia Materassi, Giacomo Buoncompagni, Alessandro Spina, Alberto Di Martino, Federica Merenda



7.

Date and time of start - end of interview: 29/09/2022      4.00-6.00 pm
Platform used: Microsoft Teams
Professional category interviewed: Victims
Number of participants:7
Researcher/Interviewer name: Silvia Pezzoli, Giacomo Buoncompagni, Nicolò Amore

[1] The project required the organisation of a certain number of focuses (7) targeting mixed groups and specific categories of public, namely: 2 focuses with judges and lawyers, 2 with journalists, 1 with victims of discriminatory acts, 2 mixed.

[2] Examples of this are the numerous references to media logics, editorial work, journalistic careers, etc., which emerged during focus groups, but were unknown to the legal actors; as well as aspects relating to the Constitution, the European Court, and in general to legal norms, national and international, which are sometimes far removed from journalistic training.

[3] In the humanities, the Typical Act is the executive and contextualising competence of a disciplinary technicality, which takes place in the light of a specific and demonstrable capacity for scientific conceptual framing, and a thorough theoretical understanding of structural processes. In understanding and defining typical acts, therefore, it is not possible to imagine a mere descriptive list of individuals “practical micro-actions”. Instead, it is necessary to work on the global understanding of what are the actions and functions of a specific profession in relation to the intended objective.

[4] <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-antisemitism>

[5] In Italy D.P.R. 137/2012 provides that all ordained professions are subject to the obligation of Continuing Education in order to maintain or improve their professional qualification. The unit of measurement of Continuing Education is the Professional Training Credit (CFP).