# The pyramid of hate in Italy

# The "Jo Cox" Committee on hate, intolerance, xenophobia and racism

# FINAL REPORT

## The Committee

- The **Committee on hate, intolerance, xenophobia and racism** was set up in **May 2016** and renamed the "**Jo Cox** Committee" the following July in remembrance of the United Kingdom House of Commons MP who was murdered on 16 June 2016.

- **The Committee is chaired by President Boldrini.** Its members comprise one MP for every political group in the House, representatives of the Council of Europe, the United Nations, ISTAT (Italian Statistics Institute), research centres and civic associations that investigate and campaign against hate speech, and experts.

- **The final report was approved by the Committee at its session of 6 July 2017** after 14 months of work that included hearings with 31 people and the collation of 187 documents (studies, research papers, monographs, data records, position papers).

## The final report

The final report examines the extent, causes and effects of hate speech, which may be defined as "advocacy, promotion or incitement, in any form, of the denigration hatred or vilification of a person or group of persons, as well as any harassment, insult, negative stereotyping, stigmatisation or threat in respect of such a person or group of persons and the justification of all the preceding types of expression on the ground of race, colour, descent, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, language, religion or belief, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation and other personal characteristics or status." (ECRI-Council of Europe definition).

The report reveals a **pyramid of hate** at the base of which lie stereotypes, misrepresentation, vilification, and hostile language that has been normalised as commonplace and unexceptional. The upper sections of the pyramid relate to acts of discrimination, including, therefore, hate speech and hate crimes.

1. Hate crimes
   Acts of physical violence, right up to murder, that are perpetrated against persons for reasons of their sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, skin colour, religion or other characteristic.

2. Hate speech
   Threats and/or incitement of denigration and violence against a person or group of persons singled out for their sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, skin colour, religion or other trait.

3. Discrimination
   In the workplace, in the provision of housing, at school, in social relations.

4. Stereotypes, misrepresentation
   Negative stereotypes, misrepresentation, insults and hostile language that has been normalised as commonplace and unexceptional.

## On gender

**20%** of Italians **think that men are better business executives and political leaders than women**.

**32.9%** **do not see any need to increase the number of women in public office**.

**49.7%** believe that **the man should be the family breadwinner** and that men are **less suited to housework than women**.

**34.4%** believe that **a mother who works outside the home is less able to nurture a good relationship with her children than a mother who does not**.

## On the LGBTI community

**43.1%** believe that **gay men are effeminate**, and 38% that **lesbians are mannish**.

**25%** **consider homosexuality a disease**.

**20%** **regard having a homosexual colleague, superior, or friend as objectionable.**

**24.8%** have misgivings about **homosexuals holding political office**. The percentage of non-acceptance rises to 28.1% for homosexual doctors, and to 41.4% for homosexual elementary school teachers.

## On immigrants, the Roma-Sinti community and other faiths

According to the "Ignorance Index" of IPSOS MORI (a polling company), **Italy is the least well informed country in the world with respect to immigration**. A majority thinks that immigrants living in Italy make up 30% of the population (the true figure is 8%), and that Muslims make up 20% (4%).

**56.4%** subscribe to the view that "**a neighbourhood degenerates when it contains many immigrants**", while 52.6% agree that "**an increase in the number of immigrants favours the spread of terrorism and criminality**."

**48.7%** believe that when jobs are scarce, **employers should give precedence to Italians**, and **35%** believe that **immigrants are depriving Italians of work**.

**65%** of Italians (compared to 21% of Germans) think that **refugees are a burden because they exploit the social benefits and work of the native inhabitants**. While 59% of Germans think immigrants make their country stronger through their work and talents, only 31% of Italians feel the same way.

**68.4%**
Although the **Roma-Sinti** are often Italian nationals and have been so for many generations, **they are regarded as the most foreign/alien of all groups.**
68.4% of those interviewed would not want them as neighbours, and just 22.6% would be prepared to accept them if they behaved in a way that they felt appropriate.

**26.9%** are **opposed to the opening of synagogues, Orthodox churches or Buddhist temples near their home**. The figure rises to 41.1% when it comes to the prospect of a mosque opening in their vicinity.

# On people with disabilities

In common parlance, the attribution of a physical or mental disability is a frequently used insult. This places people with disabilities in a difficult and disadvantaged position, even if the insult is not directed against them personally. Even expressions of pity are problematic because, besides being subtly insulting in themselves, they tend to represent all disabled people as dependent, in need of protection, and therefore not as full-fledged citizens.

# Discrimination

## Gender-based

**15.8%** of women **have suffered discrimination at school** compared with 6.3% of men. In the workplace, 36.8% of women compared with 6.0% of men have been discriminated against, while when seeking employment the figures are 44.4% of women and 2.9% of men.

**44%** of women who were victims of discrimination at work **had to quit their job** for family reasons, as against 16% of men.

## Against LGBTI people

**40.3%** of LGBTI persons **have experienced discrimination**, of whom 24% at school or university, 29.5% while seeking employment, and 22.1% in the workplace.

**10.2%** have experienced **discrimination when seeking a home to rent or buy**. 14.3% have experienced discrimination in relations with neighbours, 10.2% in the health service (by a doctor, nurse or other health worker), and 12.4% in public commercial premises or public offices, or on public transport.

## Against foreigners

**29.1%** of **foreigners report experiencing discrimination**, whether at work (16.9%) or while seeking work (9.3%), while looking for a home to buy or rent (10.5%), on public commercial premises or in public offices or on public transport (8.1%), or in dealings with neighbours (6.2%).

## HATE

## Sexism and hate

- Hate against women is mostly expressed through contempt, degradation and depersonalisation, generally with explicitly sexual connotations. Acts of violence and hate against women, including femicide, are often committed by people with whom the victims are friends or partners, or by members of their own family.

**11.9%** of women currently or previously in a relationship have suffered **violent verbal abuse from their partner**. A similar number have experienced psychological intimidation and violence. Verbal and psychological violence in the workplace has affected 8.5% of working women, women in search of work, and women who have worked in the past.

**31.5%** of women between the ages of 16 and 70 **have suffered at least one act of physical or sexual violence, mostly at the hands of a partner or former partner**. Italian women suffer more sexual violence than foreign women, while foreign women suffer more non-sexual physical and psychological abuse than Italian women. 16.1% of women have had a stalker.

- **Women in politics often become targets of specifically sexist insults**, both from colleagues (including from within their own party) and on social media. A 2016 study made by the Inter-Parliamentary Union found that over 80% of women MPs in 39 countries across the world had suffered psychological violence (death, rape and kidnapping threats), and 65% had been subjected to sexist comments and unwarranted sexual advances. Women MPs also come in for more social media attacks than their male colleagues.

- **Women are by far the main targets of online hate speech**. In Europe, one woman in ten from the age of 15 and up has been subjected to cyber abuse. In general, women are at greater risk of virtual aggression and harassment on all social media.

- A VOX survey of Twitter use in Italy found that **women were the target of 63% of all negative tweets** surveyed in the period from August 2015 to February 2016.

- The phenomenon is driven by **the representation of women in the media, from advertising to entertainment shows,** where women are often present as scantily clad bodies to be exhibited and gazed upon, or as mere subsidiary figures, and rarely as purveyors of information or opinion. Only one national newspaper (*Il Manifesto*) has a female editor, and many women journalists are relegated to covering the style, fashion and contemporary living pages.

## Homophobia and hate speech

**23.3%** of homosexual/bi-sexual people have been threatened and/or physically assaulted, as opposed to 13.5% of heterosexuals. Similarly, 35.5% of the former group have been subjected to verbal abuse and humiliation as opposed to 25.8% of the latter.

- The VOX survey found that on social media, LGBTI people are just as liable as migrants to be the targets of hate speech on Twitter: 10.8% and 10.9% respectively.

According to a survey conducted by the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), **Italy** is perceived by homosexual and transgender people as **the most homophobic country in the EU**, whether measured by incitement to hate and contempt on the part of politicians, or by the habitual use of offensive language by the general public, and 91% of interviewees reported pervasive hate speech by politicians (only Lithuania, with 92%, produced a worse result). The percentages for reported homophobia in other East European countries fluctuate between 43% and 83%, and compare unfavourably to Germany (11%), France (37%), Spain (40%) and Portugal (30%). Some 96% of respondents felt that homophobic attitudes were widely held among the Italian public.

# Racism, xenophobia and hate speech

- In a 2014 Report, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights noted **that Italy uses a disparaging form of discourse that legitimises the exclusion or criminalisation of migrants**, especially irregular ones, which engenders an environment conducive to their exploitation.

- **Social media and the web are overrun by insults, vulgar and defamatory comments against immigrants**. While no pseudoscientific theories of their inferiority are put forward, the language focuses exclusively on the immigrants' purportedly negative qualities, generally because of ignorance and misinformation. In the targeting of foreigners – especially refugees, Muslims and the Roma-Sinti community – frequent resort is made to fake news and so-called "post-truth" reporting, which tends to put appeals to emotions and personal opinion ahead of factual reality.

- **The number of racist websites** has risen exponentially in recent years.

- Various surveys (COSPE, Carta di Roma, UNICRI) show **an alarming expansion of hate speech** in direct parallel to instances of stereotyping and the manipulative misrepresentation of foreigners in the media. The difficulties of the effective inclusion of newcomers have also reinforced stereotypes and fuelled episodes of intolerance.

## Antigypsyism

- National and international surveys have revealed a **widespread and dangerous antigypsyism**  fuelled by ignorance, by inappropriately alarmist or misleading discourse (e.g. references to the "nomad emergency"), and by frequently false reporting in the media.

82% of Italians, according to a report from the Pew Research Center, **have a negative opinion of the Roma-Sinti people**, the highest percentage of any of the countries included in the survey. The divergences among European nations do not stem from demographic factors (such as the actual size of the Roma minority in the country), but from the different inclusion policies of the countries in question, and whether they encourage de-segregation and interpersonal contacts and friendships between the Roma and "gadjos" (non-Romani people).

## Religiously motivated hate

40% of Italians believe that **"other" religions represent a potential danger** and should be contained, especially the Muslim faith.

- **Antisemitism is on the rise** and is shared by one Italian in five, while antisemitic websites are proliferating. The VOX Twitter survey found that Jews were the sixth category of persons most subject to negative tweets. Jews are lower on this scale than Muslims, who, in fourth place, are now the religious group regarded with most hostility. According to a Pew survey, **Italy is the second most Islamophobic country in Europe**. Religious hatred is bound up with anti-migrant animus, but also exists as an autonomous phenomenon.

# People with disabilities as targets of hate speech

- ▪ No systematic and reliable data exists with which to measure the scope of hate speech against people with disabilities, especially online. The Vox Twitter survey found that **people with disabilities are one of the several vilified groups, albeit to a lesser extent than women, migrants and homosexuals**, and receive 6.4% of offensive tweets compared with the 6.6% directed against Muslims.

# Hate among the young: bullying

- ▪ **Just over 50%** of 11-17-year-olds have been on the receiving end of offensive, disparaging and/or violent acts by other young people; 19.8% have been victimised repeatedly over the month, and 9.1% (i.e. more than 360,000 children) are  victimised weekly. A larger number, **more than 60%, of young people have witnessed the bullying of others**.

22% **of Italian young people who use the internet and smartphones are derided and humiliated online**. For nearly 6% of them, more than 210,000 children, the bullying takes place several times a month.

82% of young people do not have a problem with using insults, ridicule or aggressive language on social media. 82% believe that the consequences for the victim are not serious and that, as no direct physical violence occurs, verbal aggression should not be treated as a serious or important matter. 68% declare that there is nothing terribly wrong with posting images of a person online without permission. In addition, they consider repeated insults or the publication of offensive images online as legitimate because the audience is restricted to a small number of people.

# The Committees's recommendations for preventing and combating hate

Based on the above analysis, the report **makes 56 recommendations** for the prevention and combating of hate. The recommendations are addressed to all the relevant entities, including: the Government, regulatory and supervisory authorities, EU institutions, international organisations, the media, the press professional association and the union of journalists, NGOs and similar agencies. The recommendations can be condensed under the following general headings:

1) address the serious gaps in the collection and analysis of data relating to hate at a national and international level, paying particular heed to the issue of sexism;

2) counter all forms of hate by promoting a national strategy that encompasses specific action plans to combat discrimination against individual groups, and implement the National Strategy for the Inclusion of the Roma, Sinti and Traveller communities;

3) approve several important bills currently under examination in the Houses of Parliament, including the bill on citizenship and the bill opposing homophobia and transphobia;

4) subsume sexist hate speech under the laws on hate and discrimination;

5) criminalise campaigns of hate (public insults, defamation or threats) directed against persons or groups;

6) draw on the experience of other countries while protecting the freedom of information on the internet to evaluate the possibility of:
   ● demanding self-regulation by internet platforms for the removal of online hate speech;
   ● making internet providers and social network platforms collectively liable under law, and compelling them to take down without delay any content that has been flagged as offensive by users;

7) require social network platforms to set up offices with adequate human resources to receive complaints and promptly remove hate speech, to activate an alert function on webpages by which users can flag such material, and to set up helplines;

8) strengthen the mandate of the UNAR (Italy's anti-racial discrimination department) by according it greater autonomy and even giving it the status of an independent authority;

9) promote a greater sense of responsibility among institutional and political figures who influence the public discourse by adopting regulatory instruments for the suppression of hate speech;

10) make victims of violence more aware of their rights, and enable anti-hate organisations to file civil suits against offenders;

11) give effect to and raise awareness of the provisions contained in the Anti-bullying Act (Law no. 71 of 2017);

12) enhance gender and citizenship education in schools to cultivate a culture of respect, encourage openness between cultures and religions, and counter intolerance and racism;

13) support and promote "No Hate" bloggers and advocates and media outlets that offer counternarratives to hate speech or sponsor information campaigns against it, especially in the non-profit sector, schools and universities;

14) oppose stereotyping and racism by raising awareness and inculcating a sense of responsibility in the media, especially online, to prevent all forms of hate speech, which includes baseless, false and defamatory reporting;

15) set up an authority to guarantee accuracy of reporting, as envisaged in bills that have been presented during the

current and previous parliaments, and exhort the press professional association and the union of journalists to enforce compliance with their standards of professional conduct.

**NOTE**

The data presented in this infographic is taken from ISTAT surveys and from other studies that are specifically referenced in the final report.
Where not expressly stated, the data refers to surveys and polls carried out in Italy.

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