# SHADOW MONITORING OF ILLEGAL ANTISEMITIC HATE SPEECH [1]

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The EU-Funded RELATION – RESEARCH, KNOWLEDGE & EDUCATION AGAINST ANTISEMITISM project (https://www.relationproject.eu) aims at defining an innovative strategy that starts from a better knowledge of the Jewish history/traditions as part of the common history/traditions, and puts in place a set of educational activities in Belgium, Italy, Romania and Spain as well as online actions in order to tackle the phenomenon.

The project activities include the monitoring of antisemitism phenomenon online in the four countries of the project (Belgium, Italy, Romania and Spain) by creating a cross-country web-monitoring of illegal antisemitic hate speech.

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The shadow monitoring exercises aim at:

- Analyzing the removal rate of illegal antisemitic hate speech available on diverse Social Media Platforms signatory to the Code of Conduct on countering illegal hate speech online, namely Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and TikTok.
- Analyzing the types of content and narratives collected by the research team.

Partners organizations focused on their country language: French for Belgium, Italian, Romanian and Spanish. Four organizations from four different countries (Belgium, Italy, Spain and Romania) took part in the monitoring exercise: Comunitat Jueva Bet Shalom De Catalunya (Bet Shalom, Spain), CEJI - A Jewish Contribution to an Inclusive Europe (Belgium), Fondazione Centro Di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea (CDEC, Italy), Intercultural Institute Timișoara (IIT, Romania).

The monitoring exercise follows the definition of Illegal hate speech as defined *"by the Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA of 28 November 2008 on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law and national laws transposing it, means all conduct publicly inciting to violence or hatred directed against a group of persons or a member of such a group defined by reference to race, colour, religion, descent or national or ethnic origin."* [2]

The content was collected and reported to social media platforms in three rounds between October 2022 and October 2023. Content was checked for removal after a week or so to give enough time to social media platforms to analyze and remove the content. [3] The monitoring exercises devote particular attention to the intersection of antisemitism and sexism.

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[2] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32008F0913
[3] The EU Code of Conduct gives the platforms 24 hours to answer to reported content.
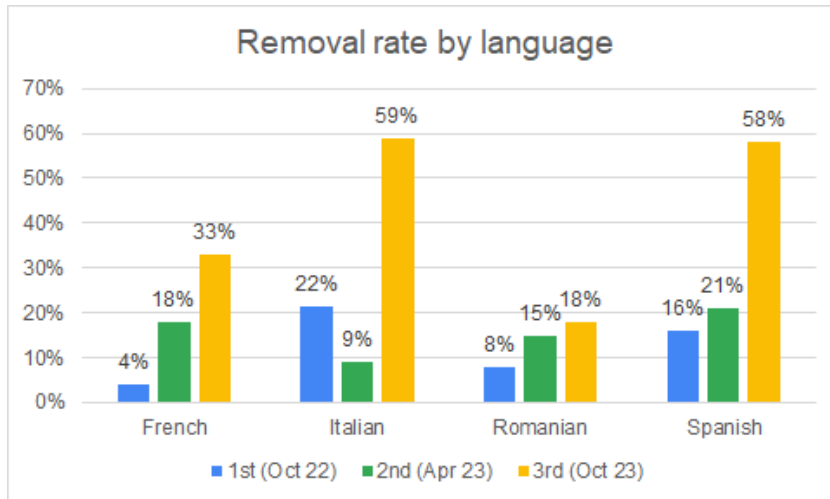
**KEY FIGURES**

**1. Notifications of illegal hate speech**

A total of **473 pieces of content** were submitted following the Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA definition of hate speech to the IT companies which have signed to the Code of Conduct in the three rounds: **173 in the first (October 6-7, 2022), 161 in the second (April 20-21, 2023) and 139 in the third (October 29-30, 2023)**.

**2. Removal Rate**

In April 2023, the platforms monitored were designated under the Digital Services Act as Very Large Online Platforms by the European Commission as they reach at least 45 million monthly active users. Therefore, during the third monitoring exercise the DSA regulations were in place for the platforms monitored. The removal rate of antisemitic content varied widely between shadow monitoring exercises. The overall removal rate increased from **12% in the first round, to 16% in the second, and 45% in the third**.

As can be seen in the following graph, there is great variation on the removal rate of content across languages and the three different monitoring exercises. All languages saw the highest removal rate during the third round, after the entry in force of the DSA. Italian and Spanish experienced an important increase on the removal of content and French an slight increase, Romanian experienced only a marginal increase.
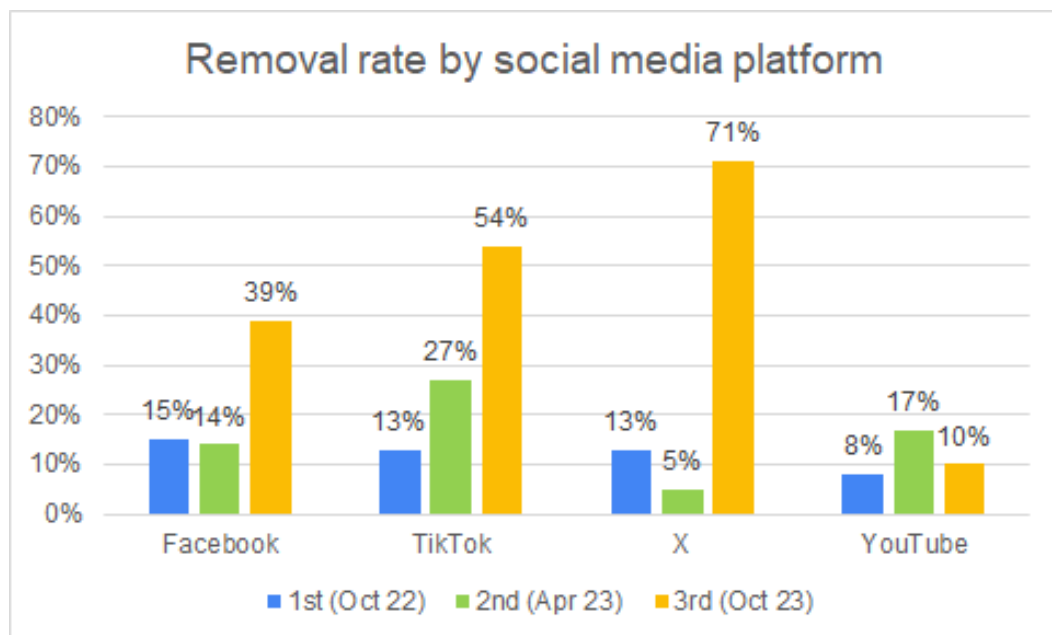
Removal rate by language

Following is a table with reported content in absolute numbers divided by platform and language in the three monitoring rounds:

| | First exercise | Second exercise | Third exercise |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Facebook** | 41 | 42 | 36 |
| French | 8 | 10 | 6 |
| Italian | 14 | 11 | 11 |
| Romanian | 9 | 10 | 9 |
| Spanish | 10 | 11 | 10 |
| **TikTok** | 40 | 41 | 37 |
| French | 14 | 10 | 9 |
| Italian | 12 | 11 | 10 |
| Romanian | 5 | 10 | 8 |
| Spanish | 9 | 10 | 10 |
| **X/Twitter** | 52 | 42 | 35 |
| French | 16 | 11 | 8 |
| Italian | 12 | 11 | 10 |
| Romanian | 14 | 10 | 7 |
| Spanish | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| **YouTube** | 40 | 36 | 31 |
| French | 8 | 9 | 7 |
| Italian | 13 | 10 | 10 |
| Romanian | 10 | 10 | 4 |
| Spanish | 9 | 7 | 10 |
| **Total** | 173 | 161 | 139 |

All but YouTube experienced a positive variation on the third round of monitoring. TikTok consistently increased its removal rate from one round to the other, while X, after showing a deep dive in its removal rate on the second round after being bought by Elon Musk and changing its moderation policy, became the platform with the highest overall removal rate, 71%. It must be added that many of the posts found on X during the last monitoring round employed violent or extreme language. YouTube is the platform with the lowest removal rate, and Facebook tended to fall in the second or third place depending on the round.

Removal rate by social media platform

| Platform | 1st (Oct 22) | 2nd (Apr 23) | 3rd (Oct 23) |
|----------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Facebook | 15% | 14% | 39% |
| TikTok | 13% | 27% | 54% |
| X | 13% | 5% | 71% |
| YouTube | 8% | 17% | 10% |

**CONTENT ANALYSIS**

In this section, we are going to analyze the content reported. It allows us to look for similarities and differences in the antisemitic rhetoric employed by social media users in different platforms and languages. Please note that this section contains some antisemitic language for the purpose of evidencing content on various platforms.

A recurrent trope found in all rounds of shadow monitoring is that of **"Jewish power"**[4]. This rhetoric is often connected with conspiracy thinking which assigns extraordinary power to Jews and Zionists (as a synonym of Jews). Jews are depicted as a conspiring group that aims to control, subvert or destroy the world, society or the country they are located, and single Jews are seen as representatives of the whole community. "They rule the world" and "I think Lebanon, Italy, Iran is full of Zionist agents, that is, Jewish communities are there to provoke and produce attacks and unrest", are examples of posts found.

**Several posts condoned or incited violence against Jews**, some of them in connection with the Shoah. Some of the comments found in Italian are: "let's set them on fire again" (not removed), "I've always said that 6 million is not enough", "all because they didn't let the Austrian painter[5] finish the job" (not removed), "#TooFew" in reference to the people dead in the Shoah, and "Jews are worse than mosquitoes, there should be spray just for them! How disgusting" (removed). Spanish speaking users also condoned violence: a Facebook user posted "Why hit a punching bag if there is such a thing as a Jew?" (not removed), another posted the following in reference to a Jewish politician "Jewish rat, you got tired of stealing and you are still in the same, I hope they kick the shit out of you, just as you wash your hands at this moment …. you always did it in your government, pro Zionist rat" (removed), hashtags like #killthejews and #deathtothejews were found on TikTok, and finally, a Spanish user published the following tweet "The only thing that Hitler did well: Killing Zionists as they are rats" and "Sure, Hitler did not do well: there are still Zionists left to kill" (not removed).

**Holocaust denial and distortion** is also found in our dataset. Some Italian TikTok users questioned the number of victims "How do you destabilize governments? What about the banks? 6 million seems a bit too much to me" (not removed). Another user affirmed that the "guy with the mustache [Hitler] who persecuted them had it all figured out well in

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[4] See: https://antisemitism.adl.org/power/
[5] "Austrian painter" is used as a code for Hitler, especially on social media.

advance...." to which another replied "yeah... he didn't get the job done in time..." (not removed). Users figured out that in order not to be blocked or have their posts/comments removed they have to use coded words "them," the "Austrian painter," "the mustache guy," and so on.

In the third round we have paid special attention to **the intersection of antisemitism and misogyny**. While still underdeveloped, there is growing research on the intersection of antisemitism and misogyny or antisemitism and other forms of hatred.[6] During our monitoring we were able to find posts such as "Jewish sl*t" (removed), "Shut up you Jewish wh*re we will beat your ass to death" (removed), *Jidancă*[7] (not removed), and more. These post are not always aimed at Jewish women, but sometimes they are targeted at women perceived as Jewish, such as the Italian politicians Elly Schlein (""She's a filthy Jewish lesbian 💩 ugly as death backed by leftist thugs" - removed) and the Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

**Israel related antisemitism** has been recurrent in all rounds, but it was especially present in the third, as the data was collected in the days following the terrorist attack carried out by Hamas in Israel. Israel and Zionists/Zionism are associated by some users to Nazism using words such as "nazionists",[8] "Judeo-nazism" and so on. Under a post showing the support of Western Europe to the Israeli government, a user comments: "The only real Jews are the Palestinians. These convert phariseans are nothing but Kittim invaders faking their own identity and genociding which they should consider, per their own religion, 'the chosen people'" (removed). Another user said "Damn the Jews a thousand times damn them GOD destroy all those Jews they are not and never have been the people of GOD these

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[6] See Cambruzzi, M, Heller, D, "Hate speech in online social platforms: An intersectional case of antisemitism and homolesbobitransphobia in the Italian context", https://www.facingfacts.eu/blog/hate-speech-online-an-intersectional-case/

[7] Pejorative term to refer to Jewish women in Romanian.
[8] Blend of nazi and and Zionist.

wicked ones" (removed); and another that "the Satanist Judeo-Zionist people of Israel will disappear from the earth and all Jewish children of Satan must die" (removed).

## CONCLUSION

The removal rate of antisemitic content in our study (varying from 12% to 45%) is in sharp contrast to that of the latest evaluation in 2022 of the Code of Conduct on countering illegal hate speech online (63%) coordinated by the European Commission. However, there are some differences between our study and the EC one:

- Only four organizations took part in this shadow monitoring exercise, compared to 36 in the EC monitoring exercise;
- This shadow monitoring monitoring lasted two days each round, while EC's lasts one month;
- The organizations that took part in this monitoring exercise limited themselves to the type of antisemitic content with regular user profiles, following the scope of this project. The EC research includes other forms of discrimination and some organizations reported content through their "trusted flagger" accounts.
- It is also important to observe the difference between the timing and differences in the number of content reported, the organizations taking part in this monitoring exercise were able to collect and report 473 cases compared to the 3634 notifications submitted to the IT companies during the 7th monitoring round coordinated by the European Commission.

The qualitative analysis of the content, as seen above, allowed us to explore antisemitic content available on X (formerly known as Twitter), Facebook, YouTube and TikTok on its hues and language, country and platform differences. Social media platforms signatories to the EU Code of Conduct on countering illegal hate speech online agreed to

remove a great number of posts in violation of the 2008 Framework Decisions, national laws, and their own hate speech policies and community guidelines or standards. This study clarifies that **more effort and an implementation of the removal process is needed to create a safer environment for social media users**.

Looking at the results, we need to highlight not only the possibility of secondary victimization, but the partner organizations call for the need for a **thorough review of policies in the Social Media Platform to avoid the spread and incentivization of hate speech**.

Antisemitism on social media is becoming ever more sophisticated, with the increasing usage of mixed media by users (text + image, for example) and the use of coded language. Users figured out that in order not to be blocked or have their posts/comments removed they have to use coded words "them," the "Austrian painter," "the mustache guy," and so on. Thus, we believe that **companies should improve their monitoring tools, employ human moderation to a greater extent**, in order to be able to recognize antisemitism in all its country-language specific variations, and **work with CSOs that have experience in this field**. Furthermore, careful consideration should be given to removal of antisemitic content on platforms heavily used by teenagers and young adults, such as TikTok and YouTube, in order to **safeguard** them **as much as possible of the effects of online hate speech and the assimilation of harmful antisemitic bias**.

**The organizations participating in the monitoring exercise are the following:**

Fondazione Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea (CDEC) - www.cdec.it; CEJI – A Jewish contribution to an inclusive Europe – www.ceji.org; Intercultural Institute Timisoara (IIT) – www.intercultural.ro; Comunitat Jueva Bet Shalom de Catalunya – www.betshalom.cat

"**RELATION**" is a project **funded by the European Union** (Citizen, Equality, Rights and Values Program – CERV) that aims at defining an innovative strategy against Modern Antisemitism, starting from a better knowledge of the Jewish history and traditions as part of the common European history/traditions. This is a two-year project that puts in place a set of educational activities in Italy, Spain, Romania and Belgium as well as online actions in order to tackle this phenomenon.

**Project partners:**

Fondazione Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea (CDEC) - www.cdec.it; CEJI – A Jewish contribution to an inclusive Europe – www.ceji.org; Intercultural Institute Timisoara (IIT) – www.intercultural.ro; Comunitat Jueva Bet Shalom de Catalunya – www.betshalom.cat; Fondazione Hallgarten-Franchetti Centro Studi Villa Montesca (FCSVM) – www.montesca.eu; University of Milan (UNIMI) – www.unimi.it; Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore – www.unicatt.it