

## **Sport and Religious Freedom**

### **A report on prayer rooms in the Olympic Villages**

#### **Milano-Cortina 2026**

Dr. Giuseppina Scala has been officially accredited at the Milano–Cortina 2026 Olympic Villages in her capacity as a research member of the DiReSoM national group, coordinated by Prof. Pierluigi Consorti of the University of Pisa.

Dr. Scala, who serves as Principal Investigator of the spin-off project on the management of religious and non-religious groups in multi-faith rooms and spaces, carried out an institutional visit to the prayer room of the Milano Olympic Village.

Her visit, conducted on February 13th, 2026, aimed to examine how religious freedom is ensured and accommodated within temporary sporting infrastructures such as those established for the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Her work contributes to a broader national inquiry into the protection of religious rights in public and private spaces, with particular attention to contexts characterized by multicultural and multi-religious participation and high international visibility, such as the Olympic Games.

The prayer room in Milano is located on the ground floor of one of the buildings inside the Village. It is a small space (approximately 15 m<sup>2</sup>) with grey walls, no windows, and no furniture other than a table, three chairs, and six black carpets. There are no pictures, holy books, or religious symbols—only a sign stating: *“This is a silent area. Please, respect the quiet.”* Access is completely free, available 24 hours a day, and the space is shared without designated or separated zones.

This facility represents a clear example of a new form of sacred space designed for multicultural contexts. This model was first implemented during the Turin 2006 Olympic Games, where a multi-faith centre was provided.

At Milano–Cortina 2026, the sporting event is organized across multiple sites; accordingly, six prayer rooms have been established across the various Olympic Villages.

The Olympic protocol includes specific guidelines for prayer rooms to guarantee athletes the possibility of maintaining their religious practices and spiritual lives during the Games (IOC *Olympic Guidelines for Prayer Rooms*). These guidelines serve as a reference framework to ensure compliance with fundamental principles of Olympism. However, the absence of a detailed, unified legal framework for sacred spaces in temporary

multicultural and multi-religious events results in significant variation in how these spaces are configured.

Beyond the prayer rooms, athletes may also access an “on-demand” service offered by representatives of different religious ministries who have been engaged by the Organising Committees to support religious and spiritual practice.

Overall, the protection of religious freedom encompasses both religious and non-religious dimensions. Consequently, these facilities and services highlight how profoundly such aspects can shape an athlete’s daily life.

The Village also includes a “MindZone,” designed for individuals seeking silence or psychological support during the competition period. This space demonstrates the need for multidimensional forms of care in high-pressure sporting contexts.

Dr. Scala’s research will continue to support DiReSOM’s commitment to advancing evidence-based understanding of the interaction between religious diversity and institutional responsibilities.

Dr. Giuseppina Scala