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EUROPEANS AGAINST FAKE NEWS

EUROPEANS AGAINST FAKE NEWS POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

"The point of modern propaganda isn't only to misinform or push an agenda. It is to exhaust your critical thinking, to annihilate truth."

— Garry Kasparov

Although the spread of disinformation is not a new phenomenon, the growth of digital information and internet usage served to amplify it, bringing new challenges for democracies and generating uncertainty, on a large scale, about the reliability of information being consumed. A recent study conducted by UNESCO and Ipsos across 16 countries where general elections will be held in 2024 found that an almost universal share of people (97%) felt they had been misled or influenced by disinformation in the media or on social media in the past, including 78% who felt this had happened to them "often". In the EU specifically, research finds that 68% of citizens believe they have encountered disinformation and fake news in the past seven days, with the figure rising to 80% or higher in some countries, notably Hungary, Bulgaria, and Estonia. Age-based variation is also apparent in the results, with younger people aged 15-24 significantly more likely than their elders to feel they have been exposed to disinformation.¹

Eurobarometer² research shows that the online social networks (selected by 64% on average across the EU) are by far the most cited media where respondents expect to encounter disinformation or fake news. More than a third of EU citizens (36%) consider it likely to encounter disinformation or fake news on television and about a fifth reply the same about online newspapers and news magazines (22%) or about video hosting websites (21%). The same survey shows that the greatest threat to democracy listed most frequently by EU citizens is 'false and/or misleading information in general circulating online and offline' (38%). This is followed by 'growing distrust and skepticism towards democratic institutions' (32%).

¹ Ipsos. (n.d.). https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2023-10/Ipsos_Global_Views_on_AI_and_Disinformation_full_report.pdf

² <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2966>



Local authorities play a crucial role in combating the influence of fake news, especially among youth. Their proximity to the community allows for tailored, impactful interventions.

Based on the work with young people at the local level done through the EAF project, a set of targeted recommendations were formulated for municipal and local authorities to address the issue of fake news and its impact on young people. Recommendations are split into several areas that are recognized as crucial. By integrating these recommendations into local government policies there is potential to significantly impact media literacy, reduce the spread of fake news, and increase the active participation of young people in promoting EU values and tackling significant societal challenges.

1. Local Action Plans against disinformation to create robust local frameworks that actively combat disinformation and fake news.

Actions:

- **Local fact-checking bodies:** Establish or support local fact-checking organizations that can provide quick responses to potential disinformation campaigns - local watchdogs.
- **Support for journalism:** Provide grants and support to local news organizations that adhere to high journalistic standards and practice thorough fact-checking and provide balanced reporting.
- **Certification or recognition programs:** Develop a certification or recognition program for local media outlets that adhere to high journalistic standards.
- **Crisis communication strategies:** Develop strategic plans for rapid response to widespread disinformation, especially during elections or public health emergencies.
- **Public alerts system:** Develop a system for alerting the public about verified instances of fake news, especially those that may lead to harm or significant public concern.



2. Community engagement initiatives to foster a proactive community approach to identify and counteract fake news.

Actions:

- **Town Hall Meetings (or Digital Town Halls):** Host regular meetings where citizens can discuss concerns about misinformation and learn more about the media.
- **Youth Councils:** Establish councils (if there are none) made up of young people to get direct feedback on the effectiveness of local media literacy initiatives and to involve them in creating solutions.
- **Hackathons and competitions:** Organize hackathons where students and other young citizens can develop tools or solutions that help detect fake news. Provide resources and mentorship from local tech communities and universities.
- **Grants for social projects:** Offer grants and funding for projects led by young people that aim to tackle issues like climate change, migration, and euro-skepticism and how to address fake-news and disinformation.
- **Mentorship programs:** Link young activists with experienced mentors in fields such as politics, media, and environmental advocacy, in order to build their capacities for active participation and building a stronger civil society.
- **Creative outputs:** Support art, video, or digital projects that illustrate the effects of fake news, encouraging creative engagement with the issue.



3. Local media literacy campaigns to increase awareness and understanding of media literacy at a local level and to enhance the critical thinking and analytical skills of young people to discern and combat disinformation.

Actions:

- **School programs:** Collaborate with schools to integrate media literacy into the curriculum. Offer workshops, guest lectures, and interactive activities that educate students on how to critically evaluate information, how to identify credible sources and how to understand the news ecosystem.
- **Public awareness campaigns:** Use local media channels, including newspapers, radio, and community bulletin boards, to disseminate information about identifying and resisting fake news, focusing on the importance of verifying information. Launch campaigns on social media that are specifically designed to engage young people, using hashtags, videos, and interactive content to spread awareness about fake news.
- **Digital literacy workshops:** Establish partnerships with local civil society organizations and education providers to conduct workshops focused on improving digital skills, emphasizing how to use internet tools to verify sources and check facts.
- **Collaboration with media professionals:** Develop partnerships with journalists and media experts to provide real-world insights into how news is gathered and reported in order to ensure that the real data and reliable information are available and on hand.

4. Emphasizing EU values to instill a strong sense of EU identity and values in young people, promoting a cohesive and resilient society.

Actions:

- **EU-themed educational content:** Support educational providers to incorporate modules on EU history, institutions, and values in their school/organizational curriculums (in case none exist already).
- **Exchange programs:** Increase opportunities for young people to experience other EU countries through exchange programs that emphasize cultural and educational exchanges, e.g., Erasmus+.
- **Public debates and forums:** Support organizations that facilitate discussions and forums around key EU topics like fundamental rights, migration, and democracy, encouraging active participation from young people.
- **Recognition of the EU values:** Support and promote EU values in all youth-relevant documents and action plans on the local level.
- **Local campaigns:** Recognize and support all local youth-led campaigns that promote EU values and European citizenship.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SPECIFIC TOPICS - EAF PROJECT:

- **Fundamental Rights in COVID-19:** Develop policies that ensure information accuracy during health crises and support digital education to reduce misinformation.
- **Climate Challenge:** Foster and support youth-led initiatives that contribute to sustainability and environmental protection.
- **Migration:** Support creation of educational programs that debunk myths and disinformation about migration and promote multicultural understanding.
- **Euro-skepticism:** Implement educational campaigns that highlight the benefits of the EU and counteract populist and skeptical narratives through factual information.

Expanding on the initial policy recommendations to specifically align with the goals and methods of the EAF project, we can tailor these policies to more effectively counter disinformation, enhance media literacy, and promote socio-political activism among young Europeans. These tailored policy recommendations aim to not only combat disinformation but also actively involve young citizens in the democratic process, enhancing their understanding of EU values and their ability to participate effectively in the socio-political landscape of the European Union.

By implementing these recommendations and actions, local authorities can play a pivotal role in mitigating the impact of fake news, particularly among young people, and fostering a community that values truth and responsible citizenship.

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