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BREAK
THE CHAIN

GLOBAL REPORT

Situation of fake news and disinformation



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1. Context

1.1 The Concept and Impact of Disinformation

1.1.1. WHAT IS DISINFORMATION?

Given the **Action Plan Against Disinformation of the EU (2018)**, disinformation is understood as “**verifiably false or misleading information** that is created, presented and disseminated for **economic gain** or to **intentionally deceive the public**, and **may cause public harm**” (European Commission, 2018). The latter includes threats to democratic processes as well as to public goods such as citizens' health, environment or security.

When talking about disinformation, the European Action plan includes those contents that are legal under national and EU law, while **excluding illegal content** (such as hate speech, terrorist content or child sexual abuse material) (European court of Auditors, 2020). Also, disinformation does not include: reporting errors, satire and parody, or clearly identified partisan news and commentary.

Moreover, as said by Meyers (2022), “in the EU, spreading false or misleading information is not generally illegal” (Meyer, 2022). In fact, one of the core values of the EU, contemplated in the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights and in the constitutions of Member States, is the **right to freedom of expression**. In terms of disinformation, this fundamental right is a great challenge for the EU. On the one side, freedom of expression limits the extent to which the government can intervene to control a certain volume of erroneous content, inherent in public communication. It's impossible to “guarantee the veracity of all the messages that reach the citizenry, because in the processes communicative confusion, misunderstandings and unintentional misunderstandings often occur” (Sádaba & Salaverría, 2022). However, at the same time, to guarantee this core value of the EU, citizens should be able to access a variety of verifiable information so that they can form a correct view and participate in an informed way in public debates.

The main problem of disinformation is the deliberate intent to spread false information, opposed to the term “**misinformation**”, which refers to unintentionally disseminate false messages. Therefore, the real challenges to access truthful information and the threats to democratic processes are the **increase in deliberate, large-scale, and systematic spreading of disinformation campaigns**.

1.1.2. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Disinformation has always had a fundamental role all along history. However, in our current cyber society, disinformation has globalized and expanded even more. The internet has intensified the scale and the speed at



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which false information reaches the public, often anonymously and with minimal cost. Special attention has to be denoted to the case of **social media platforms**, which have contributed the most to an increase in the spread of false information. As happened for example, with President Trump's campaign in 2016, where social media became an important means of spreading disinformation. This posed an imminent threat to the election results, as Cambridge Analytica, hired by the Trump Administration, targeted the delivery of disinformation content to specific users, by the unauthorised access and use of personal data, influencing their decision making.

The dissemination of false information poses a threat to citizens as it undermines or manipulates public opinion maliciously and intentionally. In the political field, **disinformation threatens to democratic processes**, politicians and policy making, by interfering with the ability of the electorate to be truthfully informed to express its democratic will through free and fair elections. Moreover, **fake news is a threat, as well, to the protection of health, the environment or the safety of EU citizens**. Currently, this problem has turned out to be especially dangerous and harmful in the framework of Covid-19, which is not only a pandemic, but also an "infodemic" (Sádaba & Salaverría, 2022).

Nevertheless, not only is disinformation dangerous for the the credibility and trust of civil society in their states, now it has also become **a weapon used in hybrid warfare strategies**. Given the latest events in Ukraine, the role of international security organization such as NATO and the coordination among members states have been essential to preserve peace and security. To this end, NATO coordinates with partners and international organizations to identify, analyze and counter disinformation. NATO's cooperation with the European External Action Service (EEAS), the European Commission, the Center for Global Engagement of the Department of State of United States, the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism and the The United Nations enhances our ability to deal with disinformation (Braže, 2022). **NATO has initiated campaigns to dismantle hoaxes**, especially these last months, related to Russia. The "setting the record straight" is one of the best known. They also did one about COVID.

Moreover, the organization of the NATO Summit of the Alliance celebrated in Madrid has been a sign of the seamless unity of the Member States. During the high-level meeting, the new NATO Strategic Concept was approved, a key document that defines the challenges of the international organization for the next decade. For the first time, the **Strategic Concept mentions, among hybrid warfare strategies, "disinformation campaigns, the instrumentalization of migration, and the manipulation of the energy supply and the use of economic coercion"** (González, 2022).



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1.1.3. THE CYCLE OF DISTRUST

We find a world trapped in a **vicious cycle of distrust**, fueled by a growing **lack of faith in media and government**. Through disinformation and division, these two institutions are feeding the cycle and exploiting it for commercial and political gain.

Flash Eurobarometer 464 on Fake News and Disinformation Online

Given the Flash Eurobarometer 464 on Fake News and Disinformation Online (2018), from a global perspective, **37% of the respondents believe that they come across fake news every day or almost every day**. A large majority of respondents think that the **existence of fake news is a problem in their country**, at least to some extent (**85%**), as well as a **danger to democracy (83%)**. They are particularly concerned about intentional disinformation aimed at influencing elections and immigration policies. The survey also emphasises the importance of quality media: respondents perceive **traditional media to be the most trusted source of news (radio 70%, TV 66%, print 63%)**. Online sources of **video hosting websites** and podcasts (27%) and **online social networks and messaging apps** (26%) are **the least trusted**. Additionally, many Europeans (71%) are at least 'somewhat confident' that they are **able to identify fake news or disinformation, only 15% say they are very confident**.

In the Czech Republic the news sources that people tend to trust the most are the radio and the television and the least online social networks and messaging apps. A 40% of respondents feel that they are exposed to fake news everyday or almost everyday. A 8% of people feel very confident that they would identify fake news. A 44% of the population consider it an important problem for democracy and they think that the ones that should stop spreading disinformation are journalists (45%), press and broadcasting management (45%) and national authorities (41%), respectively.

For Bulgaria, the most trusted source of information tend to be the radio (49%) and television (57%), while people tend to trust social media networks (29%) and video hosting and websites (25%) less. A 40% of respondents believe to come across fake news everyday and only a 14% are very confident on their ability to detect it. A 69% and a 60% of Bulgarian citizens think that disinformation is a threat for the country and democracy, respectively. Journalists and press and broadcasting management are the ones that should lead the way to stop the dissemination of fake news.

In Spain, people tend to trust more the radio and printed newspapers and magazines, 50% both. However, social media and video hosting websites are the least trusted again with a 24% and 21%, respectively. A 53% of the respondents feel to come across false information every day or almost every day and only 13% is very confident they would identify it. 51% and a 54% of the Spanish population identify it as a clear problem for the country and democracy, respectively. Journalists and national authority are the ones held responsible for the action to stop the spread of false information.



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In the case of Netherlands, the television (65%) and printed newspapers and magazines (62%) are the sources people tend to trust the most. While social media (28%) and video hosting webs (35%) the least. Only a 25% of people feel that they are exposed to fake news almost everyday, but also only a 10% feel really sure in being able to detect it. A 26% and 34% of respondents think that it's a problem for the country and for democracy and that journalists and national authorities should be the ones to take care of it.

In France, people tend to trust the radio (61%) and printed newspapers and magazines (58%) more and social media (26%) and video hosting webs (22%) the least. Every day or almost every day the respondents come across fake news (39%) and only an 11% feel really confident in detecting it. It has an impact on the country and on democracy, as by 40% and 38% of respondents, respectively. Journalists, press and broadcasting management and citizens themselves are the ones that should stop the spread of fake news.

For Cyprus, the people tend to trust the radio (52%) and the television (55%) the most and social media (33%) and video hosting webs the least (31%). 45% of respondents feel that they are exposed to fake news everyday or almost everyday, However, a 30% of people feel very confident that they would identify fake news. A 67% of the population consider it an important problem for democracy and they consider that the ones that should stop spreading disinformation are journalists, national authorities and citizens themselves.

In conclusion, **the most trusted sources given the previous countries are: the radio, television and printed newspapers and magazines**, so traditional media platforms. **Most countries' respondents feel they come across fake news everyday or almost every day**, with more than 35%. **The Netherlands is the country with the lowest number of people feeling to come across false information so frequently (25%)**. However, the country where **the highest number of people feel very confident in being able to detect fake news is Cyprus with a 30%**, while for the rest of the countries this percentage is below 15%. Also, **Netherlands is the country where less respondents thought that disinformation poses a threat to the country or democracy**. Finally, **for all countries, journalists are the ones with the responsibility to stop the spread of fake news**, followed by national authorities, citizens themselves and press and broadcasting management, depending on the country.

[Edelman Trust Barometer report for 2022](#)

As said in the Edelman Trust Barometer report for 2022, every institution must provide **trustworthy, clear, consistent and fact-based information** as this is critical for **breaking the cycle of distrust**. Given this report, **trust has declined for the government (-1 point) and media (-1 point)** while businesses are still the only trusted institutions for the countries of the survey, among which are Spain, Netherlands and France. Moreover, a 48% and a 46% of the respondents of the survey see the government and media, respectively, as a **divisive force** in society. And one of the fears that are on the rise in the global report are **hackers and cyber-attacks**, with a 71% of respondents worrying about this issue (+3 points since 2021).





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In terms of media, the sources of information that have **lost the most points in trust** from 2021 to 2022 are **social media** (-8 points), **traditional media** (-5 points) and **search engine** (-3 points). This decline in the trust in social media platforms is a trend that has been remarked by most countries in our sample, as it has been identified as a main source for the spread of fake news. France, for example, is the country where people trust social media the least from the 27 countries of the Barometer, with only a 19% of trust in this source of information. Moreover, related to traditional media sources, a 67% of the people are worried that they are **purposely being misled by journalists and reporters** (+8 points distrust). Nevertheless, most people believe information from each source automatically, or after seeing it twice or less mostly when it comes from **media reports with a named source** (57%), compared to those with an **anonymous source** (48%). Although, again social media is the source people will never believe the information is true if this is the only place they see it (38%).

More specifically, the **concern about fake news being used as a weapon has increased** by 4 points globally since 2021. In Spain, Netherlands and France, this distrust in the use of fake news is 84%, 63% and 64 %, respectively. Spain is the country of the 27 with the highest percentage concern about fake news, while France is one of the 2 countries where the worry about fake news being used as a weapon has decreased in 2022 (-1 point).

Finally, given the **Trust Index** (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2022) from 2021 to 2022, trust has decreased by -6 points in the Netherlands, -2 points in France, and kept unchanged in Spain, with 0 points variation. More specifically, **trust in the media has decreased in the Netherlands and Spain by -3 and -2 points, respectively, and it has increased by +1 point in France**. In general Netherlands is the country where there has been a higher increase in distrust and worry about fake news, followed by Spain, while in France there has been an increase in the trust in traditional media and protection against fake news, however, distrust in social media continues to be an issue in this country.

1.2 The Role of the EU

Given the threat that the dissemination of fake or misleading news poses to the democracies, members of the EU, as well as to the health, security and environment of its citizens, the EU has intensified its response to large-scale disinformation campaigns. The latter are a major challenge for Europe and require a coordinated response from EU countries, institutions, online platforms, news media and citizens (European Commission, 2022).

In 2015, to combat disinformation the European Council called the EU member states and its institutions into action, to prepare a strategy and action to counter the campaigns of Russian disinformation. This led to the creation of a communications division («StratCom») and the first of its working groups within the Service European Union for External Action (EEAS). Their main task is to combat disinformation from outside the Union (Russia) and protect Eastern European countries from misleading information, this department of the EEAS is known as the 'East Stratcom Task Force (Tribunal de Cuentas Europeo, 2021).

At the end of 2017, the Commission set up a high-level expert group tasked to advise the EU on the fight against disinformation. The group presented its report in March 2018, in which the foundations were laid for the «Communication of the Commission on combating disinformation online: a European approach» (April 2018). This Communication described the most important global principles and objectives that should guide measures to raise public awareness of the disinformation, as well as the specific measures that the Commission intends to adopt. In December 2018, an action plan with concrete proposals to offer a coordinated EU response to the challenge of disinformation was published by the Commission, the “Action Plan against Disinformation”.

Also, in 2018, a code of the best practices for online platforms, trade associations and major players in the advertising industry was established for the first time. This committed them to restrain disinformation and improve their online policies.

The next year in 2019, there was the implementation of the Rapid Alert System against disinformation. Then in June 2020, there was the communication on “The fight against disinformation about COVID-19, and the launch of the monitoring program for disinformation related to COVID-19”. The same year, there was the launch of the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO), to create and support a multidisciplinary community, including fact-checkers, academic researchers, and other relevant stakeholders who help fight disinformation.

Furthermore, to reinforce the previous action plan of 2018 on disinformation, in December 2020, the Action Plan for European Democracy was published. It includes measures to improve the current set of EU instruments to counter foreign interference. This same date, the Commission also published a proposal of Digital Services Law, for the supervision regulation, accountability and transparency of cyberspace as a response to emerging risks in this area.

One of the latest actions, in May 2021 was the start of the commissioning of the national centers of the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO), with the aim to increase the ability to detect, analyze and expose disinformation campaigns (European Commission, 2021).

Not only does the EU play a role by the implementation of regulatory and insitutional mechanisms against disinformation, but to further complement the previous framework also civil society initiatives are being financed by the EU.

To provide support to EDMO’s work, the pilot European Fact-checking Standards Project, will support the European strategy to tackle disinformation and the development of a European ecosystem of independent fact-checking organizations. In this project, six European fact-checkers and organizations investigating disinformation will guide the process to create the Code of Professional Integrity for Independent European fact-checking with the support of the European Commission. Other organizations like WeVerify, an EU co-funded Horizon 2020 project, also

engage in fact-checking and participatory verification processes, through open source algorithms, low-overhead human-in-the-loop machine learning and intuitive visualizations (EUdisinfoLab).

Moreover, actions to make EU citizens aware on disinformation are also being implemented in the Union. For example, EU DisinfoLab is an independent nonprofit research organisation where activists and experts tackle disinformation campaigns targeting the EU, its member states, core institutions and core values. This organization develops and maintains the main European platform on disinformation and makes policy recommendations at the EU level and to member states.

Also, this organization provide tools to combat disinformation, as they organise regular seminars, forums, meetings and other events to assemble activists, researchers and experts to share experiences and tools. This is also an important part in the fight against disinformation. Not only is there a need to inform, but also to provide tools and mechanisms to create societal resilience against fake news.

Nowadays, media literacy has become essential to enable citizens of all ages to navigate the modern news environment and take informed decisions. The EU recently revised the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) to strengthen the role of media literacy. It now requires Member States to promote measures that develop media literacy skills (Article 33a) (European Commission, 2022).

In this area, and related to the target group of this report, the European project funded by the Erasmus+ program of the European Commission, DIGITOL, tries to combat hate speech and disinformation with digital literacy and intergenerational contacts between the young and the elder. One of the main focus of this project is to develop older persons' digital literacy by engaging them in non-formal education and co-created training opportunities (Digitol, n.d.).

1.3 Project Break the Chain

As our societies have become more digital, disinformation has spread and keeps being a growing trend that can have a detrimental impact especially on vulnerable people of our society, such as the elderly. This issue was recently addressed during a webinar from the AGE Platform Europe, “Seniors under attack – disinformation targeted at Europe’s older people”. Here Vera Hoermann, the Research Project Officer at AGE Platform Europe, highlighted that “there is a common interest across all age groups for more digital proficiency and a shared curiosity for tackling disinformation” (Age Platform Europe, 2022). However, most of the initiatives focused on older people center around teaching digital skills to use devices and the internet, but only few of them address how to understand and react to online content nor do they provide the necessary tools for the elder to fight disinformation.

Break the Chain aims to help adults identify the impact that fake news and disinformation have on their behavior and find ways to alternate the situation. The project provides a holistic approach, focusing on introducing all the relevant information about fake news and disinformation, their impact on our decisions and ways to detect them. To this end, the main objectives of the project are raising awareness about intentional disinformation and fake news; assist adults in detecting and coping with fake news and disinformation online; enhance adults' media literacy skills; and support adults educators in developing innovative training approaches. Therefore, the direct target groups are adults aged 55+ and adult trainers, as the main intention is to provide educators with the necessary tools and methodology to empower the elderly and make them more resilient against disinformation. However, the project also indirectly addresses schools, training centres, NGOs, policy makers, research institutions and journalists.

To strengthen adults 55+ resilience against disinformation, Break the Chain will provide adults educators with new tools for their training competencies and knowledge envisaged activities for the elderly. To reach this objective this report has analysed first the situation of fake news and disinformation in six countries, which are the ones that participate in this project through their respective participating organizations are: Spain (ICMEDIA), Czech Republic (EDUCENTRUM ZU), France (E-SENIORS), Bulgaria (KOMICHA), Netherlands (ATERMON) and Cyprus (HEARTHANDS SOLUTIONS LIMITED).

After this state of art study in each country, the report analysed the knowledge and skill of adult trainers on the topics of fake news and disinformation and their current educational practices on these topics. This was done through a questionnaire, "Trainer's skills on Fake News for adults 55+", that was sent out to the responsible organizations in each of the countries with a sample of 15-20 responses by educators per country.

The design of the report will support the next steps of the project, which is to design a training methodology and documentation of desirable learning outcomes that will support the elaboration of training material directed to existing knowledge and skills gaps and envisaged training practice. The end outcome of this will be the development of a Manual that will be divided into two parts. In the first part, all relevant information about fake news and disinformation will be presented for assisting trainers to achieve a comprehensive viewpoint on the topic. In the second part of the Manual, digital tools and methods will be described for supporting trainers to foster their media competencies and incorporate technology resources into their training programs.

The next tangible outcomes of the project then will be the development of a web application containing a pool of activities on the topic of fake news and disinformation, which will be sending reminders to users to check the new activities; the development of a Dynamic Demonstrator presenting real-life scenarios in the topic of fake news and disinformation that will be used as a complementary tool to the learning process; the set up of the Break the Chain Community virtual space to support the project's adopters and practitioners; promotion of the Community and the project's outcomes through dedicated multiplier events; promotion of the project's activities in the envisaged

target group through dedicated dissemination activities; implementation of exploitation activities aiming to reach interested parties after the completion of the project; and development of a webinar for adult trainers.

Finally, some intangible results are that adult educators will gain new tools for enriching the provision of their training courses and their competencies and adults 55+ will be more prepared to spot fake news and understand the scope of disinformation and its impact on their behavior.

Break the chain: Providing ways to fight fake news and disinformation online funded by Erasmus+ program, Call 2021 Round 1 KA2-Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices KA220-ADU – Cooperation partnerships in adult education.

2. The State of Disinformation



Disinformation and fake news is a significant challenge of today's world. It is a global problem present in all project countries, where each of them has to confront their own disinformation landscape. For example, in France "disinformation" (false information that is deliberately shared to cause harm) and "fake news" (information based on real facts, used to cause harm) are used with their traditional meanings in French language. However, the Commission for the Enrichment of the **French Language recommended to use "infox" when it comes to designating false or deliberately biased information, instead of "fake news"**. "Infox" is forged from two words "information" and "intoxication" (French Ministry of Culture, 2018). On the other hand, in Cyprus, fake news together with sensationalism is seen as **clickbaits and means to manipulate the masses and spread conspiracy theories**. Furthermore, according to the annual report of the Security Information Agency of the Czech Republic (2019), the disinformation is a very serious **threat, that causes the polarisation of society, undermining trust in the democratic rule of law and its institutions**, and supporting the interests of foreign powers

Even though countries may differ in the way they name disinformation, they are all exposed to the same. **France is one of the leading countries in distrusting the news media**. According to the studies by Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (Digital News Report, 2021) only 30% of the French respondents can "trust news most of the time" (Reuters Institute, 2021). **France ranks low in terms of overall trust by international standards**, and just 21% and 19% think the media are independent of political or business influence, respectively (Reuters Institute, 2022). Also, there is a **growing concern in Czech society about the massive spread of disinformation**, 54% of the Czech (Internet) public share this concern (strongly agree / rather agree), which represents a 10 p.p. year-on-year increase. **Concerns about NOT being able to distinguish between true and false information in the media have**

also increased year-on-year (by 4 percentage points). These concerns are shared by more than two-fifths of the Czech internet public (43%).

In **Spain, 60% of the population avoids the news when browsing**, ranking among EU advanced countries that consult journalism less through Internet (Anducas & Nadesan, 2021). As said by the CNN-CERT reports, **“more than 20 million Spanish citizens, are at risk of being victims of the disinformation”** (Centro Criptológico Nacional, 2019).

Other countries, like **Cyprus have recorded high levels of mis- and disinformation**. Per the media landscape, RSF notes “direct interference in editorial work, growing media concentration and lack of transparency in media ownership,” a situation that has deteriorated during the pandemic (Reporters without borders [RSF], 2022.). Also, in **Bulgaria**, Reporters without borders state that **“media freedom in one of the poorest and most corrupt countries in the European Union is fragile and unstable”** and that “the few independent voices in Bulgaria work under constant pressure”. As a result, the country ranks 91st out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom of Speech Index, thus revealing an alarming reality concerning disinformation and fake news (RSF, 2022).

The only country where fake news is rendered as an issue of no major impact is **Netherlands. The country has a very strong media system and is known for its varied news offer**. According to the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, the country has one of the **lowest scores in Europe when it comes to measuring concern about fake news**: thanks to implemented quality standards, the Dutch culture presents a general trust in the news. Even so, disinformation is present within the country’s outlets and additional measures are always in question (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2018).

Disinformation and Politics

One of the main reasons why the **Dutch society has a higher trust in its media sources is because politics tend to be less polarised and social media play a less important role** as a source of news compared to the reality in other countries. On the contrary, the avoidance of the news by **Spanish citizens** is mainly triggered by the existing **polarization in the political sphere**. In fact, the proportion of Spanish population that thinks that the media is free from undue political influence represents only a 13%. Moreover, Spain is the second country, after Poland, where 49% of the population thinks that the main news and media editors are politically quite far apart or very far apart (Reuters Institute Digital News Report, 2022).

In the **Czech Republic**, the popularity of disinformation and conspiracy theories, and especially their penetration into the mainstream media, are also symptoms of a deeper **social crisis, an erosion of trust in traditional institutions and media**, and confusion about changes in the information space. Therefore, to limit the negative impact of disinformation on society, it is not enough to refute it or repress its originators, but also to focus on long-term and sustained efforts to strengthen trust in institutions and quality independent media (Hořejš et al., 2022).



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According to experts from Masaryk University, still recent historical experience with **communism has scarred Czech society for a long time** and it will take some time before civil society reaches a level where we are able to actively defend ourselves against the harmful influence of disinformation and propaganda. They also argue that actions coming from the grassroots are usually more effective and have a better chance than **state projects** and interventions. Indeed, these often **provoke negative reactions in society and are accused of censorship or propaganda** (Gregor & Vejvodová, 2018).

Also, in **Cyprus**, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) cite that, “while freedom of the press is guaranteed by the constitution, **political parties, the Orthodox Church and commercial interests have significant influence over the media**” (*Reporters Without Borders, 2022*). Then in **Bulgaria**, although some improvements have been noted (Freedom House, 2022), the **country remains politically corrupted and organized crime is a major issue**. As a result, disinformation is produced, reproduced, and largely disseminated under the dependence and pressure coming from the **government, political parties, oligarchs or even trade organizations, who use mass media as a tool to control/confuse the masses** (Todorova, 2021).

In **France**, **politics remains a major issue in the fake news phenomenon, both as a source or target of false information**. Also, a large proportion of French people are also convinced that politics is the main target of disinformation, ahead of international news and celebrities (Statista, 2021).

Main Sources of Disinformation

Nowadays, thanks to many technological developments, new ways of communication have surged and can be accessed by all users, as well as reach more people. Such is the case of **social media platforms, which have contributed to an increase in the spread of false information**. In fact, in **Spain the main source for fake news diffusion is social media, with WhatsApp and Facebook ranking as leaders in this distribution** (Anducas & Nadesan, 2021) as well as being the main information channels used by Spaniards, specially by young people.

In **Cyprus**, even though television maintains a central role in how people get the news, a considerable shift **towards online media reveals the risky position** in which the country finds itself, vis-à-vis the absence of an efficient regulatory framework. The existing framework is not adapted to the changing media landscape. Consequently, Cyprus is characterised by:

- the absence of obligation for ownership transparency in the written press and digital sectors,
- the lack of audited or other reliable data,
- the absence of digital media legal framework,
- and the increased corporate influence (Christophorou & Karides, 2021).



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Furthermore, the ways in which disinformation is produced, disseminated, and consumed in the **Netherlands is mostly related to social media and other online platforms that have gained great influence on the public space online**. As research shows, in this country a growing number of people “prefer to get their news information only from free and easily accessible social media” (Van Helvoort, 2021).

Online posts, blogs, Tweets, social groups, and even deepfakes tend to spread like wildfire, as noted by the Dutch government (NL Times, 2020). To make matters worse, Facebook and Facebook groups that have been growing exponentially during the last few years are known to hyper-amplify misleading narratives, conspiracy theories and other potentially dangerous discourses (Manuvie, 2021).

Also in the Czech Republic, most often, people encountered disinformation accidentally in social media posts, or read it in comments on social media or news websites, or it was shared on social media by one of their contacts. They talk about Facebook being the dominant platform that enables the active dissemination of disinformation (85.65 % of respondents). It’s important to say, however, that the majority of respondents was of younger age (only 12,3% of respondents were older than 51). Other sources of disinformation are primarily stand-alone websites of varying quality (including various opinion platforms, sites that describe themselves as alternative to the mainstream media, etc.) – these were identified as a source of disinformation by 39.21% of respondents. A third of users then identified commercial mass media as sources of disinformation. In the Czech Republic, as said before, **disinformation campaigns are most frequently shared on social sites and via e-mail**. However, according to the survey Elders on the Net from 2018, **seniors aged 65 and older are the most active senders of e-mail spam, whether true or false**. As **users get older, they spread spam significantly more than younger users**.

Social networks remain the vulnerable area for spreading disinformation and fake news also in France. According to the studies by Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (Digital News Report, 2021), **30% of the respondents share the news via social networks**. Moreover, given Statista 2021 data, more than half of Internet users said they had spotted fake news several times on their social media, and a third of them repeatedly. Also, a 83% (Media Barometer, 2017) of social media users are subject to high exposure to rumours and a third of respondents believe that some fake news is true. An interesting fact, is that celebrities and politicians with a lot of social media followers have been found to be key disseminators of e.g. coronavirus disinformation. The Oxford Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism found that while **politicians, celebrities and other high-profile public figures** were responsible for producing or **disseminating 20% of false statements about the coronavirus**, as their **posts accounted for 69% of total social media engagement** (shares, retweets, likes, etc.) (Asselin, 2021).

On the other hand, in **Bulgaria**, with print media progressively losing influence, **the main sources of information are television and internet media that are politically and/or financially controlled** and, therefore, known for their lack of independence (RSF, 2022).



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Strategies and Techniques Identified

As we have seen before, what all the countries have in common is that the main tools used to produce and disseminate fake news -and other misleading materials, like conspiracy theories- are online posts and through social media sites. As was the case with COVID-19 disinformation, the increasing influence of online posts, comments and discussions have become particularly detrimental for civil safety and health (O'Connor, 2022). Some of the most used techniques to disseminate disinformation that have been brought up by the countries are trolls, deep fakes, bots as well as the use of social groups in Facebook. Also, the creation of webpages to create communities of disinformation and spread fakes where mentioned and hoaxes, clicbaits and artificially amplified social media content and accounts. Another important issue that many countries encountered is the lack of fact-checkers and regulation to limit the dissemination of fake news through social media platforms, such as Facebook, specifically.

Disinformation campaigns are a major problem in countries like the Czech Republic and **Bulgaria. Campaigns are most frequently shared on social sites and via e-mail.** According to a survey from the Czech Republic, Elders on the Net, (2018), seniors aged 65 and older are the most active senders of **e-mail spam**, whether true or false. As users get older, they spread spam significantly more than younger users. Spam includes true messages as well as hoaxes and disinformation. **Hoaxes, clicbaits and artificially amplified social media content** and accounts have also been identified by countries like Cyprus and the Netherlands.

One of the main strategies used for disinformation in Netherlands and France, is the creation of **misinformation communities (online groups, mostly operating on Facebook)**. Mainstream social media such as **Facebook and Twitter are still hosting the common online political discussion in France**. This creates a vulnerable space for disinformation.

Also, these countries mentioned the spread of **“More false context than fabrication”**: unfounded rumours, fabricated polling results, poorly processed photos used to generate news headlines occasionally appears especially during election period. In this context, an important tool used to disseminate fake news are videos. **Old pictures and videos are often shared and spread as an “evidence” to provoke strong emotions of the people.** **Disinformation videos on Facebook, within and beyond the Netherlands** have been detected. Some research suggests that statements are more likely to be believed when they are introduced with images. For example, a misleading Pfizer vaccine video uploaded on Facebook by a Dutch anti-vaccination and flat earth conspiracy theorist.

The fact that the previous video went viral reveals “the inconsistencies in how Facebook applies fact-checking labels to unverified and misleading content” (O'Connor, 2022). Additional postings of the video were seen on Instagram, Twitter, and the video platform Bitchute. This same problem **surged in Bulgaria, with COVID-19 related**



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disinformation on social media: Anti-vax posts, creation of anti-vaccine and conspiracy-theories groups. Here as well, perpetrators utilised the lack of restrictions/penalties on social media (primarily Facebook), mainly with anti-vax posts deprived of fact-check labels. Also, in the **Czech Republic, the problem of lack of fact-checkers is identified, as they said that global social sites (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter) have a very limited regulation of malicious content.** During COVID-19 these sites have been pushed into the position of content controller, however, their interpretation or degree of tolerance is rather loose as the business model of social media is built on supporting the dissemination of information that will bring them profit.

However, not only are social media platforms the ones to disseminate fake news, but also websites are used and created with this purpose as detected in Spain and France. For example, in Spain, as identified in the report from the universities CEU and URJC (2019), **CasoAislado, a web prone to the creation and dissemination of false information,** published that in August 2018, "Pope Francis asks European women to reproduce with Muslim immigrants to combat the low birth rate".

In these cases, there also tends to be a **"content 'recycling' and coordinated link sharing"**, where many different **websites are producing different fake news or disinformation** from a single quote. This means that different websites are "recycling" the information which can multiply disinformation and fake news and create an illusion of newsworthiness and credibility. Also, **"memes and text on images"** are used, such as images that include **fabricated quotes, exaggerated statistics and use inflammatory language.** For example, in the Netherlands, there has been a misuse of national databases for monitoring adverse vaccine reactions

In Bulgaria, as well as in Spain, disinformation in the country comes from non-traditional media outlets (e.g. social media), but also from traditional sources (e.g. journals). For example, in Spain a Greenpeace report that analyzed disinformation in WhatsApp, discovered that these fake news mainly came from well-known sources, such as, Okdiario (17%), Mediterráneo Digital (7%) y Libertad Digital (5%) (Greenpeace, 2019). In Bulgaria, false claims on major mainstream TV and radio stations are a major problem (Rone & Hristov, 2020).

Moreover, some techniques that have gained importance lately are the use of **robotization and artificial intelligence (AI) technologies** for the **creation and massive dissemination of false content**, for example through **bots, trolls and deep fakes.** In fact, the GTM report tells how during the pandemic in Spain in 2020, a network of 672,000 bots operated on the official page of the Ministry of Health on Facebook, artificially manipulating the 'likes' statistics of this institution (Del Castillo, 2020). Also, in the Czech internet environment, a bot appearing on Facebook under the name Tom Lebr became famous. This attacks interest and political pages and groups, usually related to environmental protection, the LGBT community or discussion topics regarding the European Union.

However, not only **algorithms are used with malicious purposes**, but they also serve to create **trolls**, as Spain, the Czech Republic, and Bulgaria mentioned. These **users with real or false identities post false and offensive**

messages. Then, as said in a report from the universities CEU and URJC , the combination of accounts with false identities and bots cause the networks to be flooded with disinformation (Gelado & Puebla, 2019). In the Czech Republic, Čeští elfové (Czech Elves) pointed out that the activity of trolls on social media, however, significantly decreased after the expulsion of some Russian diplomats on 19 April 2021. The information found thus points to the fact that employees of the Russian embassy in the Czech Republic may have been responsible for spreading disinformation using fake profiles. Also BIS and Semantic Visions (providing technological tools to fight disinformation) confirmed that it is one the probable possibilities that there was a troll farm in the Russian embassy. According to Vrabel, the data analyst from Semantic Visions, the disinformation scene in the Czech Republic operates with the help of the so-called "fifth colony" that the Russians have managed to build in the Czech Republic in recent years. The vast majority consists of Czechs who have been infected with the disinformation virus created in Russia and is being further developed to mutate and be as infectious as possible (Keményová, 2022).

Additional to bots and trolls, another technique mentioned in the previous report are **“deep fakes”** (Salaverría, R., et al. 2021), detected in Spain and Bulgaria, which **manipulate multimedia contents, mainly videos, using AI tools.** With these technologies **the perpetrators digitally manufacture, manipulate or simulate facial features, movements and voices of people and artificially create avatars.** In Spain, the most notorious case was the advertisement of a 'resurrected' Lola Flores (a famous local singer), Cruzcampo, a beer brand (Alonso, 2021). In the Czech Republic, a deep fake video of Zelensky calling for surrender which wasn't technically true was spread in social bubbles of people who are susceptible to disinformation or who can be considered vulnerable, as Russian disinformation resonates.

Finally, the topic of **cyberattacks** has been brought up by the Czech Republic, where according to the latest Cybersecurity Report in the Czech Republic for 2020 issued by National Office for Cyber and Information Security, there **were 468 cybernetic incidents reported (out of which 9 were very serious), 1267 security incidents reported and 738 phishing attacks solved.** The largest number of incidents were detected by public administration and medical institutions (year-on-year increase 267%). The most typical cyberattacks were ransomware, dDoS attacks and spear-phishing (National Office for Cyber and Information Security [NÚBIK], 2021). Among the most frequently used techniques were undoubtedly **spear-phishing which involves sending e-mails with a malicious attachment or link to initially infect the recipient's devices.**

Call for Action Against Disinformation

In Bulgaria, the state of media literacy in the country is problematic, with a significant number of citizens using unreliable sources like Facebook for informational purposes and the country **lacking policies that would enhance general responsibility.** With **corrupted mainstream media and influential platforms like Facebook** lacking

resources to combat disinformation and propaganda in Bulgaria, the **country scores high in media illiteracy** (Todorova, 2021).

Also **Cyprus**, based on a monitoring and reporting programme for the transparency and accountability of platforms, **figures among the countries with the poorest policy mix and very low-level country-specific responses against disinformation** (Meyer et al, 2021). To tackle the challenges of new media and to lessen the alarming effects of mis- and disinformation, **Cyprus needs to update its regulatory framework** with the scope to provide fundamental protection in the rapidly expanding digital environment. It also needs to establish market plurality, work towards promoting the political independence of the media, and increase social inclusiveness.

In the **Czech Republic**, the majority of the population has a vague awareness of the existence of disinformation, they do not understand the mechanisms and motivations behind its spread or its impact. Awareness of the various ways to counter lies and manipulation also remains very low. It is therefore advisable to continuously identify the needs of the public in this area and to offer appropriate awareness-raising and educational services (Hořejš, N. et al, 2022).

France, as noted before, is one of the **leading countries in distrusting the news media**. According to the studies by Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (Neuman et al, 2021) **only 30% of the French respondents can “trust news most of the time”** (Reuters Institute, 2021). Just **21% and 19% think the media are independent of political or business influence**, respectively (Reuters Institute, 2022). The **attitudes towards trusting media differ between seniors and younger adults**. For instance, according to Digimind, a majority (**79%**) **25-34 years old “often doubt veracity”** of the received information. When it comes to the age category of **50-64**, a majority would **“like the media give the sources of their information so that they can do it by themselves”** (Asselin, 2021). Nearly, **one out of five seniors are registered on social networks**, according to the association Cristian Pensioners Movement, 2.4 million French seniors are registered on social media however, **a majority of them (80%) uses social networks for the private communications and relationships rather than getting information** (Mouvement Chrétien des Retraités, n.d.).

On the other hand, the **Spanish government has been present in all moments to inform the citizenship and control issues and frames that were being discussed during Covid-19** (Anducas & Nadesan, 2021). Also, the government, following the **Action Procedure against Disinformation**, implemented **permanent monitoring of the networks in search of fake news and communication campaigns to counter them** (Junquera & González, 2020). Also, **in France** the level of engagement of the government has increased against disinformation and fake news, especially during the election periods. In 2018 **French Parliament passed a law which allows judges to remove the “fake news” during election campaigns** (Ansamble Nationale, 2018). In Netherlands, as well, online posts, blogs, Tweets, social groups, and even deepfakes that spread like wildfire have urged the **Dutch government to launch anti-fake news campaigns on several occasions** (Ollongren, 2018).

Moreover, apart from government interventions, the primary strategy to combat the spread of disinformation in **Spain is the implementation of educational programs and citizen training**, which take the **Train-the-trainer** approach (Van Helvoort, 2021). Given, the SMILE report from Spain, several teacher training initiatives have been identified throughout the Spanish territory. The training courses and workshops stand out, especially remote ones; as well as the proposals and didactic guides that seek to promote the development of the critical thinking and the capacity for analysis among students. In this train-the-trainer approach, **in Spain, universities for seniors play an important role**. For example, through the AEPUM (State Association of University Programs for Seniors), public and private universities, as well as other entities with legal personality seek to provide university education for the elderly. Among these objectives is the empowerment of the elderly, where educating against disinformation plays an important role and to this end workshops on disinformation have been organized in various Spanish cities in 2021-2022 (Asociación Estatal de Programas Universitarios para Mayores [AEPUM], 2021).

However, authors like Pintado, consider that in terms of **media literacy Spain** is “not making many changes that allow progress in this aspect to generate a society with critical and solvent capacity when it comes to addressing the disinformation” (Pintado, 2021). Moreover, the author considers that there is a **lack of fast-checkers in the country**, as only four Spanish organizations belong to the International Fact Checking Network (IFCN) association; such are Newtral, Maldita.es, EFE Verificación and Verificat (Pérez-Escolar & Herrero-Diz, 2022). Nevertheless, university training on fact-checking is beginning to be carried out in Spain, although it is still incipient (Ramon Llull University, Rey Juan Carlos University, CEU San Pablo University, The Core School, etc...).

It’s interesting to note that the **lack of fact-checkers is a challenge identified by many countries** of our sample. In such a context, **Cyprus** has recorded high levels of mis- and disinformation, thus highlighting the **need for additional policies, verification tools, and fact-checking processes**. Also in **Bulgaria**, not only do unreliable sources prevail within the community, but the **number of journalists willing to investigate the truth is still alarmingly low** out of fear of the system’s retaliation.

3. Legal and Policy Framework



Democracies have been addressing the problem of disinformation for some time. Driven by a proliferation of cases, mainly during electoral processes, and also at an international level, such as Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, heightened the urgency with which democracies must respond to disinformation. Therefore, many governments have introduced national laws to counter hostile activities like disinformation.

Advertising Policies



Those policies that try to tackle disinformation by promoting or including the use of **brand safety and verification tools**, engaging with **third party verification companies** and **assisting advertisers** to assess media buying strategies and online reputational risks. These policies include not only national regulations, but also, **self-regulation**. In general, most countries have autoregulated policies, where the advertising industry (advertisers, advertising agencies and the media) formulates the rules with which advertising must comply. Such is the case of the Netherlands, Spain and Bulgaria, which have **Code of Conducts** to which companies can adhere to control their advertising activities. Also, there are **national regulations of a more commercial nature** to protect people from untrue or misleading advertising, as in the case of Spain and the Czech Republic.

In Spain, the regulations fundamentally aimed at **advertising of commercial nature** are:

- Unfair Competition Law
- General Advertising Law
- Law of Consumers and Users

Apart from these general regulations, there are many other **sectorial regulations** (audiovisual law) or by product, from the regulations of food advertising, to those of cosmetics, or medicines and health products, and the more than 100 technical-sanitary regulations that regulate the different categories of food products; plus the EU Regulation on food health claims or the Spanish royal decree on advertising with intended health purposes.

In terms of self-regulation, there are also **21 general and sectorial codes of conduct related to advertising**. A well-known Code of Conduct is that of the association AUTOCONTROL. **The Advertising Code of Conduct**, established in 1996, and inspired by the International Code of Advertising Practices of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), binds all the companies adhering to the Association, which undertake to comply with its rules and submit to the Advertising Jury, which is the body in charge of monitoring compliance.

Moreover, AUTOCONTROL has created a **Code of conduct about the use of Influencers for Advertising (2021)**, which since January 2021 invites influencers to clearly label content for commercial purposes.

Also in Netherlands, there exists a **Dutch Advertising Code**, a detailed code of ethics and conduct formulated by the self-regulating system of advertising. It stipulates that **advertisements must not be misleading or untrue** (Stichting Reclame Code [SRC], 2017).

In terms of self-regulation, also in **Bulgaria there is the National Council for Self-Regulation (NCSR)**, an **independent body for self-regulation**, established by the three main participants in the Bulgarian advertising industry: the Bulgarian Association of Advertisers (BAA), the Bulgarian Association of Communications Agencies (BACA) and the Association of Bulgarian Radio- and TV Operators (ABRO). NCSR provides the Bulgarian National Ethical Standards for Advertising and Commercial Communication, where basic rules are provided in the form of a



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Code (The National Council for Self-regulation [NCSR], n.d.). However, **no additional and formally implemented policies of these type to fight disinformation are known.**

In the **Czech Republic advertising is regulated by Advertising Regulation Act which prohibits advertising violating good morals, advertising containing discrimination or violence or using fear motives.** It mustn't diminish human dignity or national or religious beliefs. This law prohibits therefore, misleading advertising (the presentation of false information about a product or service that causes a consumer to purchase it, whereby the consumer would not have purchased the product without the misleading information) and Hidden, Subliminal and a Spam advertising. Apart from the law, through the **Project NELEŽ.CZ, advertisers are alerted that their advertisements may appear in a negative context** and thus jeopardise the reputation of the advertised brand itself. Therefore, they ask advertisers not to fund disinformation and manipulative websites whose content divides society.

On the other hand, in the case of **Cyprus there are no clear rules for online platforms and advertising**, with limited transparency of both sources and limited labelling (Christophorou & Karides, 2021).

Political Advertising Policies

This policies are those that **increase transparency of political advertising** and that **help civil society better understand the political online advertising ecosystem.** Under these policies, we can see that most **countries don't have any strict or specific rules to regulate the content** that can be **shared by political parties or individuals.** While there is some regulation, such as in France, Cyprus and Spain, these are vague and not really centered on the dissemination of information from the political sphere. Another characteristic that this regulation has in common, for example in Spain and the Czech Republic, is that it's **mostly focused on the means used and the way information is brought to the public than on the content of the same.** Finally, an interesting fact brought up by many countries is the **low regulation in terms of the information that can be spread by political parties and individuals through social media and online platforms;** with the exception of Netherlands, that created the First national Code of Conduct on online political advertising in the European Union.

In France, there is the law against the manipulation of information, which aims to better **protect democracy against various forms of intentional dissemination of fake news;** passed its second reading in the National Assembly on 20 November 2018 (French Government, 2021).

Also in **Cyprus, to preserve democracy the Public Service Media (PSM) follows relevant regulation for "ensuring access and impartiality visa-vis all social actors and groups in general and political groups** during election campaigns are implemented efficiently" (Christophorou & Karides, 2021). However, the **private audio-visual sector lacks transparency** and there is no regulation for online media.



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On the opposite side, the Dutch government has created the **First national Code of Conduct on online political advertising in the European Union signed by Dutch political parties and global online platforms** “11 out of 13 parliamentary parties and global online platforms (Facebook, Google, Snapchat, TikTok) have made transparency commitments regarding online political advertisements during election campaigns” (The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2021).

In the case of Spain, the regulation on misleading advertising does not reach political speech. This regulation is fundamentally aimed at advertising of a commercial nature. The same happens in Bulgaria.

Nevertheless, **in Spain the political regulation would be regulated by electoral legislation and may have some temporary restrictions for its broadcast**, specifically for some media. It has **little regulation in terms of content**: very protected by freedom of expression and with few limits, but always without causing harm to the fundamental rights of individuals or institutions.

In terms of **institutional advertising, this is basically regulated by the Institutional Advertising Law**, at the state level, and some similar laws of some Autonomous Regions. Its objective is basically **to prevent public money** (aimed at informing, raising awareness or educating the population on matters of public interest) from being **used to create advertisement that benefits the people, groups or political parties that occupy the institutions**.

Also, in the **Czech Republic**, the rules for the promotion of political parties are rather loose. **Advertising Regulation Act intentionally does not include political advertising**. Czech regulation of political advertising focuses mainly on form, i.e. regulation of who, where and how political advertising can be carried. It is less focused on content, which is only given vague boundaries of honesty and integrity. In 2015 the **Act on the Operation of Radio and Television Broadcasting was amended and prohibited political commercial communication**, however, it only applies to radio and television and **excludes social sites or internet** in general through which the disinformation is shared most frequently. Unfortunately, disinformation shared by political parties and representatives is also a case in the Czech Republic. It is clear that it is and will be necessary to look for new mechanisms to ensure free and ethical political advertising or, more broadly, the transmission of political ideas and values (Havlíková, 2020).

These regulations are those that limit the **abuse of platforms by inauthentic users**; regarding identity and the misuse of automated bots on media platforms, **impermissible use of automated systems** or **impersonation and misrepresentation**. Many of the regulations under service integrity are controlled by penal codes, such as in France and Spain, and refer to publications of third parties without their consent and use or manipulation of other identities. Respect to private life, life in peace and dignity in France are also contemplated under the law. In the Czech Republic and Bulgaria, personal data protection laws have been remarked, for media platforms as well as for commercial purposes. Finally, the misuse of automated bots or other techniques that use AI, are controlled by

countries like Netherlands and Spain, through national action plans focused on creating an ethical and controlled artificial Intelligence ecosystem.

In France some of the regulations in this area are stated in its **Criminal Code** (code pénal):

- Article 226-1 punishes with one year's imprisonment and a fine of 45,000 euros the fact of **violating the privacy of another person by fixing, recording or transmitting, without the latter's consent**, the image of a person in a private place.
- Article 226-8 punishes with one year's imprisonment and a fine of 15,000 euros the publication, by any means, of a **montage made with the image of a person without his or her consent**, if it is not obvious that it is a montage or if it is not expressly mentioned (French Government, 2021).
- Article 222-33-3 provides that **'knowingly recording** [and disseminating the recording], by any means, on any medium whatsoever, **images relating to the commission [of] offences' constitutes an 'act of complicity in deliberate attacks on the integrity of the person'**. The article "shall not apply where the recording or broadcasting results from the normal exercise of a profession whose purpose is to inform the public or is made in order to serve as evidence in court (Dechamps & De Clercq, n.d.).

Moreover, in France, there are other articles and laws related to the individual freedom and rights of its citizens, such as:

- Article 27 of the Freedom of the Press Act of 29 July 1881 (L'article 27 de la loi sur la liberté de la presse du 29 juillet 1881) **punishes the propagation of false news when it is likely to disturb the 'public peace'**.
- Article 35 quater of the amended Law of 29 July 1881 on the **freedom of the press** provides that the **dissemination**, by whatever means and on whatever medium, of the reproduction of the circumstances of a **crime or offence, when this reproduction seriously affects the dignity of a victim** and is made without the latter's consent, is punishable by a fine of 15 000 euros. It should be noted, however, that the law provides for a three-month statute of limitations.
- Article 9 of the Civil Code (article 9 du code civil), where if the falsification concerns an aspect of private life, the victim may refer the matter to the interim relief judge, on the basis of the provisions. According to this everyone has the **right to respect for his private life'** (protection against any infringement of the right to name, image, voice, privacy, honour and reputation, oblivion and one's own biography).

Finally, more related to the digital world, in accordance with the **French law on confidence in the digital economy** (loi pour la confiance dans l'économie numérique, LCEN) of 2004, **platforms**, in their capacity as hosts, are obliged to **hold and retain data enabling the identification of persons using their services**. The law establishes a summary procedure ("LCEN summary procedure") which allows the judicial authority to stop damage caused by the content of an online public communication service by blocking access to or deleting online content.



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In Spain, the law focuses in this sense also more on the criminal code, such is the Organic Law 10/1995, of November 23, of **the Penal Code**, collects in its Title XVIII the different types of **legally punishable falsehoods**; It is, above all, **various forms of counterfeiting and identity theft**. Apart from these criminal falsehoods, there are others that we do not corresponds to a criminal type, but which usually also receive **moral reprobation**: the **misrepresentation of information, willful exaggeration of facts, willful omission essential information or even certain satirical expressions** (Sádaba & Salaverría, 2022)

Also, in **Cyprus**, the criminal law covers “the deliberate dissemination of disinformation in case it poses a **threat to peace or the public order**” (European Digital Media Observatory, 2021). However, there is no regulatory framework in place for online media (Christophorou & Karides, 2021) .

On the other hand, in **Bulgaria many propositions on the topic of disinformation have been rejected by the government**. One was the **Proposition of the 2020 ‘Emergency Bill’**, which contained a provision amending the Criminal Code by adding penalties for anyone who transmits, false information on the spread of infectious diseases (e.g. COVID-19) through radio, telephone, or other means; however, it was vetoed by the President of the Republic of Bulgaria (DataGuidance, 2021). The second proposition rejected was the **Proposition of the 2020 ‘Radio and Television Bill’**, which aimed at amending the Radio and Television Act on matters regarding prevention and restriction of disinformation in the internet environment; however, it was rejected by the Parliamentary Culture and Media Commission (DataGuidance, 2021). Finally, there was a real **Amendment to the Personal Data Protection Act (2020)**, a **bill** aiming at fighting against the dissemination of disinformation online by:

- **holding responsible the owners of websites/platforms/social media accounts/blogs/ that promote disinformation.**
- stipulating that all **owners of websites, online platforms, social media accounts, and online blogs should disclose** in a prominent place on the websites, online platforms, social media accounts, and online blogs **information about themselves as data controllers** (DataGuidance, 2021).

Also, in terms of **personal data protection in the Czech Republic**, the subject of **sanction are commercial offers or advertising messages, from Czech legal entities, sent to people who are not customers of the offer or who have not given prior consent to the offer or to address them** with offers via electronic mail. However, it is relevant whether any damage or harm has been caused and whether it was the mass mailing. The method of submitting a complaint can be done via an anonymous web form. (Úřad pro ochranu osobních údajů, 2004).

In terms of automated bots and systems, the **National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence** (known as ENIA), is a component of the Plan for the Recovery, Transformation and Resilience of the Spanish economy, and one of the fundamental proposals of the **Digital Spain Agenda 2025**. The National Artificial Intelligence Strategy, aims to

provide a reference framework for the development of an inclusive, sustainable and citizen-centered artificial intelligence and the establishment of an **ethical framework in artificial intelligence**.

When talking about AI, **Netherlands created the AI Coalition and the Strategic AI Action Plan**, which aim at strengthening the foundations for ethical and legal rights by:

- Protecting public values and human rights; Actions include taking **regulatory measures to protect users' data and improve the accuracy of algorithmic decision making**.
- **Building trustable, reliable AI**; Actions include getting as many Dutch companies as possible to take part in the pilot phase of Ethical AI Guidelines, as well as a future report being written with the European Commission with an opinion on AI & Gender.
- **Maintaining open, competitive markets with consumer protection in mind**; Actions include better enforcement and modernisation of the consumer protection rules in the EU. For example, on that basis, consumers need to be informed when personalized prices/price discrimination is taking effect. (Haimoura, 2020).

Policies and Actions to Empower Consumers

Policies that empower consumers in their online experience, such as resources for users on how to identify and limit the spread of false news and mechanisms for users to report fake news. In this sense there were two types of policies brought up: **policies of commercial nature to protect consumers**, dealing with **the labelling of products** as well as with the **general buying terms and conditions**, and policies that protect people from disinformation, understood as **"consumers of disinformation"**. For the latter, countries have adopted or amended laws to **include in their educational systems the concepts of media literacy and digital competences**. Furthermore, as in the case of Spain, a **commission against disinformation** has been created as this phenomenon has been placed in the category of **"national threat"** and citizens are protected by the same through the new National Security Strategy.

In Bulgaria, they implemented the **National Consumer Policy**, by the Ministry of Economy, Energy and Tourism, this policy aims at protecting consumers' interests by promoting "the cooperation between administrative authorities (including consultation with consumers organizations) having competencies in the field of consumer protection" (Ene, 2012). To support the ministry in implementing the consumer policy the **Consumer Policy Unit (CPU)** aims at "lobbying for consumer interests (...) and establishing information and education activities designated to raise consumers' awareness about their legitimate rights" (Ene, 2012).

Other policies and procedures taken in Bulgaria in the consumer protection area are:



- **The Commission for Consumer Protection (CCP):** “a wide range of statutory powers and duties, recently extended according to legislation under the Law on Consumer Protection and the Law on Consumer Credit” (Ene, 2012).
- **Consumer Protection Units** “functioning as local authorities, competent both in the field of enforcing the Law on Consumer Protection (with regard to price indication, product labelling, consumer claims settlement) and in providing information and advice to consumers” (Ene, 2012).
- **Bulgarian National Association “Active Consumers”** (BNA, formerly Bulgarian National Consumers Association): campaigns to expose misleading labelling on organic food products, education on young consumers nutrition, Internet safety, and financial services/ publication of brochures, books and a consumer monthly magazine (“Consumer”) (Ene, 2012).

In the Netherlands on the other hand, some self and co-regulation exists to empower consumers, such is the **Sociaal Economische Raad (SER, Social Economic Council) encourages business and consumer organisations to consult each other about mutually satisfactory general terms and conditions** (The social and economic council, n.d.). Moreover the Netherlands adopted the the EU Directive on Collective Actions that safeguard consumer rights, **“Fair deal for consumers”** (A Fair Deal for Eu Consumers, n.d.).

While in the previous countries regulations focus more on the **commercial aspect of consumers**, in Spain the laws deal with consumers, as to **empower people susceptible to consume disinformation**.

In the academic field, the **recent education act, LOMLOE, includes digital and media literacy skills at different educational stages**. The new curricula that the LOMLOE is going to be aimed at teaching how to use knowledge rather than the accumulation of encyclopedic knowledge. It is no longer a matter of acquiring knowledge per se, but of **students knowing how to use it in order to channel the flows of information -and disinformation- typical of today's society until they are converted into authentic knowledge** (Fundación Española para la Ciencia y Tecnología, 2021).

Moreover, the INTEF (Instituto Nacional de Tecnologías Educativas y de Formación del Profesorado), in collaboration with the Autonomous Governments, has developed the Digital Culture Plan in Schools (Plan de Cultura Digital en la Escuela) with different projects. **INTEF also holds training aimed at the faculty in Teaching Digital Competence** (Competencia Digital Docente), understanding that developing digital competence in the educational system requires teachers to have the necessary training in that competence. In this sense, the **Common Framework for Teaching Digital Competence** (Marco Común de Competencia Digital Docente) has been developed (European Commission, 2021) Last May 4, 2022, for the first time, the Ministry and the autonomous governments have agreed to **update the reference framework for digital teaching competence**. In education it is very difficult to reach a consensus, but they have agreed to update digital skills in education. A system similar to





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that of languages (A1, A2, B1, B2...) is going to be implemented in the training of teachers to teach students these skills throughout the country. It is a framework proposal addressed to all teachers who teach the teachings regulated by the Organic Law of Education, in which convergence has been sought **with the European frameworks of citizen digital competence, of educators and of educational centers**, elaborated by the Joint Research Center of the European Commission (Instituto Nacional de Tecnologías Educativas y de Formación del Profesorado [INTEF], 2022).

Moreover, in terms of media literacy, the law 13/2022, of 7 July, **la Ley General de Comunicación Audiovisual, stipulates** that “The competent audiovisual authority, the service providers of audiovisual communication, audiovisual communication service providers and video sharing service providers to go through the platform, in cooperation with all interested parties, including organizations, associations, colleges and professional unions in the field of communication and journalism, shall adopt measures for the **acquisition and development of media literacy capacities in all sectors of society**, to citizens of **all ages and for all means**, and will periodically **evaluate the progress made**” (Boletín Oficial del Estado. Ley 13/2022, de 7 de julio, General de Comunicación Audiovisual).

Also, in Bulgaria the educational field has been tackled to reinforce digital knowledge, with the adaptation of the **Bulgarian education system of the standards of the European Union: “National Program of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in Schools,”** implemented by the National Parliament and its Committee on Media and Education in 2006 (Peicheva & Milenkova, 2016). To that end, the Ministry of Education and Science has played a significant role in creating and disseminating documents meant to **help people develop skills for dealing with the Internet and the new media** (Peicheva & Milenkova, 2016).

Furthermore, in Spain at a national level and directly related to disinformation was the adoption of a **Procedure for action against disinformation** by the Council of National Security. This procedure is included in Order PCM/1030/2020, of 30 October (O. PCM/1030/2020, de 30 de octubre). This rule establishes the **mechanisms of struggle and cooperation against the dissemination of false or misleading information** disclosed for lucrative or to deliberately deceive the population and that may cause damage public. Likewise, it creates the **Permanent Commission against disinformation** (Sádaba & Salaverría, 2022).

Since December 2021, disinformation has been considered a national security problem in Spain and is thus included in the new **2021 National Security Strategy (ESN21)**. One year later, this complemented the Disinformation Action Procedure approved by the National Security Council in October 2020. For the first time, it includes disinformation campaigns as a "serious threat to electoral processes" and also argues disinformation as a possible source of polarization in society and blames it for the loss of trust in institutions by citizens (Gobierno de España, 2021). This is an important regulations because it has categorized disinformation as a national threat.

4. Responses to Disinformation



4.1 Governments

As said before, disinformation poses a threat to the stability and resilience of Western democracies as well as to the safety of its citizens. Therefore, apart from the legislation regarding disinformation and cybersecurity, advertising, political and non-political, and the protection of consumers rights, many countries have taken additional initiatives. Countries have taken actions not only at a national level, but also in collaboration with other governments and the European Union itself.

NATIONAL RESPONSES

To sum up, what most countries are doing against disinformation from a national standpoint is investing in **educational programs and citizen training, focused mainly on schools and youth** or even adults, lacking a more specific response for the elderly. Moreover, a general problem seems to be the **weak state collaboration with fact-checkers and/or the lack of fact-checking networks**, except for the Netherlands. However, another important response have been **public awareness campaigns**; procedures and **action plans against foreign digital interference**, mainly from Russia in the case of Eastern European countries; **national digitalisation strategies** focused on augmenting people's media literacy; empowering networks, projects, and **research dedicated to fighting disinformation**, through funding; **reports**; **national actions plans** and strategies specifically against disinformation; and setting up **committees, forums and action units**. It's important to note that many initiatives have been triggered by the need to protect election campaigns. Also, mainly Eastern European countries feel that, generally, information, tools and support come from non-governmental stakeholders and are posted online on their websites and social sites.

In line with the **Action Plan on Disinformation from the EU** many countries have implemented measures to protect themselves from **foreign disinformation actions**.

In Spain, in October 30, an action procedure against disinformation was decreed, **the Action Procedure against Disinformation**, (O. PCM/1030/2020, de 30 de octubre), directed by the National Security Council. The norm establishes the mechanisms of struggle and international cooperation against the dissemination of false or misleading information disclosed for profit or to deliberately deceive the population and that may cause public

harm. It was activated to **"act against disinformation"** in the **local media** and adopt measures against any **campaign of fake news coming from a foreign country**.

Also, **in France, on 13 July 2021, Viginum** was created, a new branch of SGDSN (Secretariat-General for National Defence and Security), it's the State's technical and operational service responsible for vigilance and protection against **foreign digital interference**. Viginum responds to a major challenge: **to protect the public debate from the manipulation of information from abroad on digital platforms**. Its missions are to detect and characterise any phenomenon of suspicious propagations of misleading or hostile content on digital platforms, orchestrated by foreign actors in order to harm France and its interests. Viginum's activity is organised around protection operations, targeted on a particular theme for which a posture of vigilance is necessary: institutional, democratic, political, societal, historical or sporting events that are known and planned, or current events (Secrétariat général de la défense et de la sécurité national [SGDSN], 2021).

In the Czech Republic, the Centre against terrorism and hybrid threats of the Ministry of the Interior (CTHH), active since 2017, **activities monitors threats directly related to the internal security including disinformation campaigns**, their responsibility is to evaluate the detected problems and come up with proposals for substantive and legislative solutions. Also, they disseminate professional information and raise awareness about the problems in question to the general and professional public, translated and adapted to Czech environment a manual RESIST created by a team of Lund University (Sweden) but the dissemination is not strong enough and the recommendations are primarily designed for state representatives. They also translate measures recommended by EU. In the **context of the conflict in Ukraine they launched web site Braňme Ukrajinu, braňme Česko**. The Centre against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats (CTHH) of the Ministry of the Interior recommends, in view of the escalation of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, **to share only verified information from credible sources**, to actively oppose Kremlin war propaganda and to report hateful or illegal content on social media (Kordík, 2022).

Not only measures have been taken against foreign intruders, but there also are many initiatives that have been incentivized by the disinformation campaigns that spread during national election procedures. For example, in Netherlands a **public awareness campaign** was set up in 2019. The campaign aimed at informing people about the spread of disinformation online: "The campaign, which came **months ahead of the EU Parliamentary elections**, was **predominantly waged on social media**;" its goal was to "make Dutch voters more aware of the possible presence of disinformation and help people to recognise it" (EU DisinfoLab, 2019).

In May 2018, **Spain commissioned the National Cybersecurity Council** to combat disinformation and eventually created a specific body to **combat disinformation before the 2019 elections**. Moreover, since December 2021, disinformation has been considered a national security problem and is thus included in the new **2021 National Security Strategy (ESN21)**. One year later, this complemented the Disinformation Action Procedure approved by the National Security Council in October 2020. For the first time, it includes disinformation campaigns as a **"serious**

threat to electoral processes" and also argues disinformation as a possible source of polarization in society and blames it for the loss of trust in institutions by citizens (Gobierno de España, 2021). This is an important plan because it has categorized **disinformation as a national threat**.

In the Czech Republic, Michal Klíma, the government's newly elected media and disinformation envoy, is preparing a new department at the Office of the Government that will analyze disinformation and prepare campaigns to respond to them.

In 2018, the Bulgarian government began setting up a unit and **contact points for countering fake news and disinformation**, aiming at protecting its **election processes**: it established an **Anti-disinformation unit** positioned within the Council of Ministers and operating under the Deputy Prime Minister's responsibility (Miljković et al, 2019). This unit is enshrined in the Joint Action Plan of the European Commission and the European Parliament and linked to the Emergency Response Coordination (between Member States) Center as well as the Situation Center of the European External Action Service.

Furthermore, the actions taken by states go further than protecting the country and informing and warning the public about disinformation, they have also developed tools to detect fake news and promote media literacy. Recently, in Spain, the National Cryptologic Center (CCN), attached to the National Intelligence Center (CNI), has published the "**Report on Good Practices BP/13 Disinformation in cyberspace**" with which it intends to explain the main characteristics and methodology of the current actions of disinformation, with the **aim that citizens and end users of digital communication media have the tools that allow them to critically consume and share information** and avoid being involuntary accomplices in offensive actions against the interests of the State. All this, facilitating the **necessary resources to identify specific products and communication platforms** to this kind of action (Centro Criptológico Nacional, 2019). Likewise, it creates the **Permanent Commission against Disinformation**, one of whose working groups deals specifically with **strategies to promote media literacy among the population** (Sádaba & Salaverría, 2022)

There is also **INCIBE**, the National Cybersecurity Institute of Spain, which provides through its **Internet Security Office (OSI)** the necessary information and support to avoid and resolve security problems that may exist when browsing the Internet. They have deployed **campaigns against disinformation**, focusing on specific target groups such as the **Experiencia Senior** campaign.

In **Netherlands**, the **national digitalization strategy** gives special attention to **media literacy**. This strategy focuses on artificial intelligence, the use of data, digital skills and inclusion, digital connectivity, digital resilience, digital governance, and digital cooperation on different governmental levels (European Commission, 2021). It specifically **targets youth** by increasing formal and non-formal curricula that promote **media literacy and online safety**, as well as raising awareness about the risks posed by new media.

The **Cypriot state** also supports the joint effort to fund research and initiatives regarding mis- and disinformation. ‘**Combating Disinformation through Media Literacy grants**’ is a funding program meant to promote a multilateral approach in addressing the problem of disinformation. It was announced by The Department of Communication and Internet Studies at the Cyprus University of Technology, the Horizon 2020 European project Co-Inform, the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth, and the U.S. Embassy in Cyprus, as a follow-up action of the 2019 **Combating Disinformation through Media Literacy conference**.

In Bulgaria, there are also initiatives adressed to the youth as the many national programs and strategies indicate, these are:

- The National Strategy for **Implementation of ICT** in Bulgarian **Schools** (2005)
- The National Program of **Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)** in **Schools** (2006)
- The National Strategy for **Lifelong Learning** 2014-2020 (2014)

Moreover, the country has some action plans to generate **more resilient digital competences among its society**. This can be seen through the the National Program Digital Bulgaria (2015) and the “**Digital Bulgaria 2025**” (continuation of Digital Bulgaria 2015), the National Program with six key priority areas (Ministry of Transport and Communications, 2019):

- Establishment of appropriate conditions for the development and accessibility of **digital networks and services**;
- Developing a dynamic and innovative digital economy and increasing its growth potential;
- Enhancement of **digital competence and skills**;
- Ensuring effective and high-quality public e-services for business citizens and government;
- Promoting a secure cyber ecosystem: **addressing the challenges of cybersecurity**;
- Internet governance.

Also in **the Czech Republic**, digital competences are an important challenge for the country. This has led to the creation of **DigiKoalice**, a platform of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the National Pedagogical Institute of the Czech Republic that connects the world of **schools and ICT in digital education** with a **focus on the development of digital skills for children and adults**

The Netherlands, **to support the media community, through the Stimuleringsfonds voor de Journalistiek (SVJ)**, Stimulation Fund for Journalism, promotes the quality, diversity, and independence of journalism by **reinforcing the journalistic infrastructure**. They provide for subsidy programs, research, and events. Although it is an independent administrative body (ZBO), SVJ receives an annual contribution from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, from which all activities are financed. Also, the Netherlands benefits multi-level and inter-



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disciplinary approaches, committed to re-evaluating all relevant actions and to further advancing the EU Action Plan on disinformation. With collaborative actions, additional tools developed (like **publications, fact-checking tools**, etc.), and proper **lobbying and funding**, Dutch institutions and organizations largely contribute to the fight against misleading and disruptive forces and show promising signs of further improvement.

Also **in Spain, the government involves the research community as well as civil society** in the fight against fake news. Shortly after the National Security Strategy plan 2021, a **Forum against disinformation campaigns** in the field of National Security was created. It was approved by the Council of Ministers on May 31, 2022 and for the first time it goes down to the detail of who will compose that forum. It is presided by the Department of National Security and is **made up of the government and representatives of civil society (university, journalists, verifiers...)**.

In terms of consumers rights, **Cyprus has set up a “Consumer Protection Service”** (Ministry of Energy, Commerce and Industry): An online platform for raising awareness and **providing information on several consumer issues**. In their ‘Know your rights’ section, consumers can navigate through fundamental consumer rights and find solutions about matters like disputes. The platform also provides a Consumer Helpline (Ministry of Energy, Commerce and Industry, n.d.). Also, **in the Netherlands The Dutch Authority for Consumers & Markets (ACM)** operates a website called ConsuWijzer. ConsuWijzer informs **consumers and businesses on their rights and obligations** by means of the web, E-mail and telephone.

Finally, given the current health crisis, countries have special measures against the well-known “infodemic”. To protect peoples’ health through the access to rightful information, **in Spain, the Ministries of Health and Science and Innovation** have launched a **Plan for the people health protection against pseudo-therapies (2018)**, which includes the preparation and publishing of evaluation reports on the scientific evidence of certain techniques and procedures (Salaverría, et al. 2021). Along with this Plan, the Government launched the website www.coNprueba.es to develop the **#CoNprueba campaign (2019)**, which encompasses the **actions against pseudo-sciences and pseudo-therapies** (Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación & Ministerio de Sanidad, 2021). Dissemination actions will be carried out for all audiences in order to combat disinformation and hoaxes about science and health on the internet and with support guides for journalists on practices to deal with controversial health issues (Servicio de Información y Noticias Científicas [SINC], 2019).

In the **Czech Republic, the Security Information Service (BIS)** has dealt with the misuse of **negative mood generated by anti-epidemic measures** to incite violence, organize the dissemination of deliberately false information, as well as to exert or disseminate potential influence of a foreign power.

INTERNATIONAL JOINT RESPONSE

Previously, we mentioned how during the high-level meeting of the Summit of the Alliance, the new NATO Strategic Concept was approved, and how for the first time this document mentions “**disinformation campaigns**” among **hybrid warfare strategies** (González, 2022). Therefore, disinformation has become a problem that needs global cooperation and an international joint response. In this context, countries have established initiatives in collaboration with other countries as well as with the EU. Moreover, information verification and fact-checking initiatives have surged through EU collaborations, such as Rapid Alert System (RAS), EDMO and the Covid Vaccine Media Hub.

With regard to improving the capacities of the EU institutions to detect, analyze and counteract disinformation and more specifically, in the contribution of personnel to the centers of excellence in the field of **disinformation and hybrid warfare**, **Hybrid COE** was created. The initiative to establish Hybrid CoE originated from the Joint Communication by the European Commission and the High Representative to the European Parliament and the Council “Joint framework on countering hybrid threats – a European Union response”, decided in Brussels on 6 April 2016. **Spain, France, Czech Republic, Netherlands and Cyprus participate in this initiative** (Hybrid CoE, n.d.).

Moreover, in November 2018, **Russia signed an agreement with Spain** to create a **joint cybersecurity group**. The move came after Spanish ministers accused Russia of spreading disinformation about the 2017 **Catalan referendum** (EU DisinfoLab, 2019). Moreover, given the many campaigns of disinformation from Russia during the last global phenomena like Covid-19, the international threat that this poses makes the cooperation of European states with international organizations like NATO essential. Therefore, NATO coordinates with partners and international organizations to identify, analyze and counter disinformation. NATO's cooperation with the European External Action Service (EEAS), the European Commission, the Center for Global Engagement of the Department of State of United States, the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism and the The United Nations enhances our ability to deal with disinformation (Braže, 2022). NATO has initiated campaigns to dismantle hoaxes, especially these last months, related to Russia.

Amid COVID, the EU established **the Rapid Alert System (RAS)**, which is an important element of the EU's overall approach to tackling disinformation and is **one of the four pillars of the Action Plan against Disinformation** endorsed by the European Council in December 2018. The RAS is set up among the EU institutions and Member States to facilitate the **sharing of insights related to disinformation campaigns and coordinate responses**. In **Bulgaria**, for example, **the Anti-disinformation Unit**, positioned within the Council of Ministers, **is the contact point with the Rapid Response System**. On the other hand, **Cyprus claimed it's failing to support the EU Rapid Alert System**, as well as it fails to transpose EU Directives into Cyprus Law (Christophorou & Karides, 2021).



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Other countries like Spain participate in the **RAS** (Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Unión Europea y Cooperación, n.d.). The entire Administration is involved in the fight against disinformation, each Ministry from its field of activity and with special attention to possible threat scenarios. **Netherlands also supports the European Rapid Alert System, not only by acknowledging INTCEN** (Intelligence Analysis and Reporting Centre) and its **Hybrid Fusion Cell**, but, also, by establishing and **maintaining strong bonds and collaboration with the European Digital Media Observatory** (EDMO). The same happens with Spain as it collaborates with the **European Digital Media Observatory** (EDMO), through the Spanish-Portuguese hub **IBERFIER**, led by the University of Navarra. It's made up of twelve universities, five verification organizations and news agencies, and six multidisciplinary research centres.

The **IBERIFIER consortium** aims to develop a media observatory to fight disinformation in Spain and Portugal. IBERIFIER is one of the eight existing national or **multinational hubs in Europe within the framework of the Digital Media Observatory (EDMO)**, whose objective is to develop a **multidisciplinary platform to address the challenge of digital disinformation in Europe** and its consequences. Czech Republic participates through the hub with Poland and Slovakia (**CEDMO**); Netherlands with Belgium form the **EDMO BE/NL**; and France has the **DE FACTO** observatory of information.

Another hub, this time related to the health sector, is the **Covid Vaccine Media Hub initiative**, an international **project of truthful information for journalists on covid vaccines**, which offers professionals and the general audience the analysis of expert sources on the latest research and evidence related to vaccination.

4.2 Civil Society

Civil society must not only be protected from the dissemination of fake news, but citizens also need to take an active role against disinformation. Universities, educators, organizations (eg. NGO's) and civil associations are dealing with this surge of false news by teaching media literacy skills, as well as by providing fact-checking tools and webs. Most actions are focused on setting up an **educational system and preparing educators by providing them with digital competences**, rather than by **specifically training them on disinformation**. In terms of developing media literacy skills among the population, there is a **special interest in social media and the new media platforms literacy**. The media literacy and educational programs are **mostly for youth** or the population as a whole and although there are some **addressed to seniors, these are few in comparison to other target groups**. Also, there are **few fact-checking mechanisms** implemented by civil society actors.

NATIONAL RESPONSES

Some of the initiatives that have been implemented are "train-the-trainer" actions where educators are the ones that receive the necessary competences to deal with disinformation and educate citizens in this field.





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In France, in 2018, **La Ligue de l'enseignement** published the educational course "**Les veilleurs de l'info**". Since then, nearly 150 **trainers have been trained** in the use of this course, and have themselves trained 800 education professionals and associative members, and made nearly 1500 **young people aware of the fight against fake news** and conspiracy theory. In order to continue the dynamic and have an even greater impact on the educational spheres, the Ligue de l'enseignement produced the web series "**Les Veilleurs de l'info**", which complements the educational course.

Furthermore, in the **Czech Republic**, JSNS (Člověk v tísni), is an educational program of the biggest Czech non-profit organization **targeted at primary and secondary schools**, that created their own teaching material on media literacy and critical thinking and **provide support and education to teachers**.

In Spain, the Library Cooperation Council formed the **Information Literacy working group** for the **Integration of IL/AMI skills in the educational system**. This report has been prepared with the aim of allowing and facilitating the real **integration of media, digital and informational competence in the day-to-day activities of educational centres**. The objective/result: a study of the role that the educational system must assume in the information and technology society in which we are already living.

In Bulgaria **the Online Media Literacy Program for Adults and Mentors** of Local Communities, is organised by the Media Literacy Coalition and the "Friedrich Naumann" Foundation for Freedom, with the support of support from the U.S. Department of State sponsored Alumni Thematic International Exchange Seminars (Alumni TIES); Lachezar Tsotsorkov Foundation, Sofia Municipality Europe Program, US Embassy Small Grants Program. The programme **aims at training mentors in local communities** (including union leaders and health mediators), as well as **vulnerable groups (the elderly 55+, children)** who have access to the internet but have not yet **developed the skills to browse safely**. Also, the Media Literacy Coalition is a coalition that brings together organizations in the fields of education, **journalism and civic participation, academics and media literacy experts**. It aims at increasing **media literacy in the Bulgarian society** and integrating relevant actions into the educational process. To that end, its main concern is to build strategic partnerships with all organizations and institutions relevant to education and media literacy in Bulgaria (ministries, non-governmental organizations, media, etc.).

Apart from educators, also students are starting to receive media literacy options and efforts, specifically, primary and secondary school children. For example, in **Cyprus** there is the '**Antibodies to Misinformation**' (Open University Cyprus), a project aiming at designing, developing, and applying a model experiential program for **media education against disinformation** to pilot schools. The project focuses on **enhancing** Cibervoluntarios. **cognitive attitudes and the skills** that **adolescent students** need to **critically cope with information in digital media**. The educational program is being designed and applied by the participating students themselves, members of the CyberSafety Youth Panel in cooperation and guidance by journalists, educators, and policy makers.





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There is also the **'Co-Creating Media Literate Youth'**, a project managed by the Cyprus Youth Council, which aims at introducing **young people of Cyprus**, as well as the general public, to **media literacy concepts, tools, and skills, such as verification tools** and structural issues in media that lead to the rise of disinformation. The project also aims to develop awareness on how disinformation affects democratic processes and leads to the rise of extremism, racism, sexism, and other kinds of hate speech as well as to address examples where stereotypes in certain subjects such as gender equality, climate change, LGBTQI+ rights, are wrongly promoted.

In the **Netherlands**, there is the SLO (Stichting Leerplan Ontwikkeling), which **together with schools**, develops continuous **learning in digital literacy** that pays attention to **media literacy**, information literacy, computational thinking, and basic IT skills. In the **Czech Republic**, there is a group of Pedagogical faculty students from Masaryk university Fakescape, teaching through an attractive virtual game and that targets **primary and secondary schools**.

In Spain, Controla tu Red is a project from Fundación MAPFRE and National Police that seeks to **help young people** understand how **social media and information technologies work**, so that they learn to use them safely and adequately and are able to identify and report dangerous situations. **In Bulgaria**, the GATE Institute organises events and **summer schools** to **help** learners identify disinformation and fake news (The Big Data for Smart Society Institute [GATE], n.d.). Lastly, **the Czech Republic, Občankáři** is an association of Social Science teachers whose goal is to increase the **quality of education at Czech schools**.

Furthermore, there are also initiatives that are addressed to the whole population independently from the age. In **the Netherlands**, the **Dutch Media Literacy Network** consists of over a **thousand organizations committed to media literacy**. These include libraries, cultural institutions, media coaches, developers of teaching material, educational publishers, research institutes, IT companies, media producers and platforms, educational institutions and care and welfare organizations. Established as a program in 2008 by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the network is now managed by five core partners: the Dutch Institute for Sound and Vision, Kennisnet (expertise centre for ICT in education), ECP (an information society platform), NPO (a public broadcasting company), and KB (National Library of the Netherlands). Their joint efforts aim at promoting **active citizenship via media literacy** and consciousness of risks inherent in **new media**. To that end, they organise events and campaigns -among other actions- annually.

In the **Czech Republic**, **Zvolsi.info** is a group of students, graduates and educators from Masaryk University, that created this platform about fighting disinformation, organize lectures about **media literacy and published a book** called **"The Best Book about Fake News, Disinformation and Manipulations"**. Moreover, **Čeští elfové** (Czech elves) is a civic initiative and an internet group that aims to combat foreign disinformation campaigns and Russian propaganda in Czech cyberspace. Their activities include **fighting and exposing trolls on social networks**, analyses and periodical reports, database of disinformation chain e-mails and popularising the issue of **disinformation campaigns** among **journalists, politicians and the general public**.





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In Spain there are many association such as **Alfa-Media**, a non-profit association, made up of experts from the associative, professional and academic fields in the different technological, educational, legal and communication fields, whose main objective is to **promote and collaborate in the development of initiatives** related to **media and information literacy**; **Fundación Cibervoluntarios**, an international Spanish NGO, promotes the use and **knowledge of technology as a means to alleviate social gaps**, generate social innovation and empower citizens, favor their rights and enhance their opportunities; and **Learn to Check**, an educational and informative project that aims to **reflect on disinformation and bring digital verification and media education closer to society**. In addition to training for all audiences, offers open resources and collaborates with different entities and actors to work for media education and critical thinking.

Moreover, Fundación Cibervoluntarios, in collaboration with Newtral Educación, launched **VERIFICA2, a program to fight disinformation and fake news**. The project is structured around free cyber training to raise public awareness, provide the **necessary tools to verify information** and stop the viralization of false content on **social networks**.

In Bulgaria, the project “**European approach towards public competencies in digital environment in conditions of post modernity**” has been orgnaized in frame of International Academic Seminar on Media and Education in Philosophical Faculty, South-West University, carried out in 2014 (Peicheva & Milenkova , 2016).

In relation to the group of **the elderly 55+**, **initiatives for this target group specifically also have been created**. In **France**, there are many associations that deal with disinformation, such as **L’Observatoire zététique and Fake OFF**, and more specifically, associations that focus on the elderly, such as **E-Seniors**.

In the Czech Republic, Project Fakt? (since March 2020), implemented within the framework of the Active Citizens Fund programme, aims to support civil society and strengthen the capacity of non-profit organisations, cooperation of **Elpida, an organization dedicated to the education of seniors**, and **Transitions**, strengthening the independence and professionalism of investigative journalism, media, digital and **civic education for seniors and older adults**, prepare and organize courses.

In Spain, many associations and initiatives are directed to the elderly, also by **universities for seniors**. For example, **EXPERTCLICK** is a training program from Cibervoluntarios.org to provide **older people** with the necessary tools that allow them to take full advantage of new technologies in order to increase their quality of life.

Provuldig2 is project **focused on the elderly**, that brings together and coordinates institutional, informative and research actions of six consolidated Communication Research groups at Madrid Universities. Moreover, **AEPUM: Workshops Against Disinformation for the elder**. Via Círculo Jefferson, with the collaboration of the US Embassy and universities for the elderly associated with AEPUM, organizes five conferences in five different cities and



universities in Spain on how to detect and combat disinformation, in a hybrid format of face-to-face and/or remote attendance.

One interesting group that has been mentioned, are refugees and asylum seekers. With language barriers accentuating **refugees and asylum seekers** confusion regarding fake news (especially in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic), the following actions were taken to fight against disinformation in the Netherlands:

- Information cafes and helpdesks organised by several NGOs.
- Pharos (an expert centre for healthcare) translated and circulated government information about the virus, precautions and government policies into – among others – Arabic, Tigrinya and Farsi.
- The translating centre, Global Talk, has translated the government press conferences into eight languages so that refugees are directly informed on the developments. (Van Liempt & Kox, 2020).

Finally, other action taken by civil society groups is to create fact-checking **mechanisms and tools**. For example, in **Bulgaria, Factcheck.bg is a new independent platform for fact-checking**, developed on the initiative of the **Association of European Journalists – Bulgaria**. The editors of the site choose the claims to check, according to the relevance and public importance of each of the topics or their source. Factcheck.bg is guided by the first and basic rule in journalism – checking the facts, tracking the information, what the source is and what its motives are.

Moreover, the **GATE Pilot Project on disinformation**: the GATE Institute focuses on the Gradual development of a digital infrastructure to provide support and data for **comparable research in social media analysis** in Bulgaria (Dobrev, 2021). To that end, it collaborates with AI4Media (A Centre of Excellence delivering next-generation AI Research and Training at the service of Media, Society and Democracy), the Association for the Development of Information Society, the Center for the Study of Democracy, the National Library Ivan Vazov (Plovdiv), and Ontotext (a global leader in enterprise knowledge graph technology and semantic database engines). Furthermore, there is **the institute for the study of democracy**: it works on **fact-checking, with a special focus on disinformation related to politics** (Dobrev, 2021). It collaborated with the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF)-European University Institute, in order to help implement the European Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM) (Spasov et al, 2017).

In the **Czech Republic**, there is **Demagog.cz to fact-check the factual claims of the political elite** and StopFake, a journalistic initiative focused on fact-checking and refuting verifiable disinformation about Ukraine that appears in the **media and analysis of Kremlin propaganda**.

The Netherlands, has the Dutch Association of Journalists (Nederlandse Vereniging van Journalisten, NVJ), an independent, non-political, non-governmental association striving for **high-quality media and freedom of speech**.

Also, the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) is a strong and active union that organises meetings and events with regards to **ethical and safe journalism**.

INTERNATIONAL JOINT RESPONSES

As countries collaborate with each other against disinformation, so does civil society. Many projects have been carried out by associations, NGO's, universities, libraries and foundations in collaboration with the EU.

In the **Netherlands, Spain and Belgium SMILES** is an Erasmus+ supported project with a focus on media literacy. The project is all about helping young **people learn how to combat fake news and disinformation**. It will develop and pilot a series of workshops aimed at **students aged 12-15** to be delivered in **libraries and schools** in these countries.

Also, in **Cyprus and the Czech Republic**, the project **Youth MythBusters (YMB)** aims at promoting the **engagement of youth and those at risk of social exclusion (NEETs)** in democratic and civic life; it also aims at enhancing their critical thinking and **media literacy** in order to strengthen **democracy and fight manipulation**, propaganda and fake news. A capacity building programme will **train young influencers** to become active citizens, to assume the role of leader in the civic and democratic life, and to face the challenges of the new media era.

Moreover, **Cyprus** has implemented the **'CYberSafety'European project**, brings together key national stakeholders with the aim of creating a secure internet culture, empowering creative, innovative and critical citizens in the digital society. In Cyprus, stakeholders aim at contributing to the European efforts for **battling disinformation, through an awareness platform** (containing information, resources, and helpful tools), as well as through shared experience, expertise, and good practices. Through this Project, Cyprus also hopes to provide quality and quantitative feedback on online safety issues for **children**. To achieve this, a Helpline function has been activated: users can get advice and support from qualified and **trained real-time** assistants and scientists on issues related to the use of online technologies. The Hotline can also be used to report illegal content and actions related to child pornography, racism and xenophobia and to immediately forward said reports to the appropriate authority for further investigation and action.

Apart from trying to create a safe online and informed culture, as before, there are also programs that train-the-trainers. For example, in **Cyprus, the 'European Media Coach Initiative' (EMCI)**, a replica of a successful Dutch training programme, has **trained teachers and other professionals in young people's empowerment** when dealing with multiple challenges of the information society and the media, the internet, and **social media (in particular)**. Providing valuable insight into the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours that are required for safe and responsible digital experiences, to programme's goal was to promote active citizenship via critical thinking (Paideia News, 2021).



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In addition, ‘TechCamp Cyprus-Digital Citizenship in the Disinformation Age’(2018) were participant-driven workshops that **connected young Cypriot and European civil society leaders, social entrepreneurs and aspiring journalists** with the skills needed to strengthen their communities. Participants worked alongside technologists with the scope to develop long-term projects and programs that **can increase media literacy and an overall safe, responsible, and discerning digital experience.**

The ‘Larnaka-DigiEduHack 2020 was created to tackle fake news during and after CoVid-19’. It’s a hackathon to **connect professionals, innovators, and entrepreneurs in enhancing media literacy education.** By showcasing their solutions, stakeholders help tackle mis- and disinformation challenges during and after the CoVid-19 pandemic. In Cyprus, there was also the “Fake News: A phenomenon of manipulation in the modern world” seminar, organized in Nicosia by the European Parliament Information Office in Cyprus, the Cyprus News Agency, the Union of Cyprus Journalists, the Cyprus Radio-Television Authority and the Cyprus Media Complaints Commission. The seminar highlighted the new media risks and challenges and concluded that measures for **self-regulation and penalties are needed to tackle the phenomenon of fake news.** Most importantly, speakers insisted on the importance of **education from a young age** on such matters.

Also, **Spain and Bulgaria**, through some organizations have been involved in the project **Get Your Facts Straight**, which main outcome was a **toolkit for educators and trainers**, to teach media literacy through disinformation workshops for **young people and their parents**. The document includes learning objectives, training outline, learning materials, recommendations, and lessons learned from a pilot test.

Finally, as we have seen before also **fact-checking initiatives** have been developed in collaboration with many associations, organizations and civil society stakeholders from the different countries. The **EDMO** (European Digital Media Observatory) project, mentioned before, is a European initiative that is an **international network of hubs in which experts in the field of disinformation join forces and share knowledge.** On the **Dutch side, the partners are the following: the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision, Leiden University, University of Amsterdam, the Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau (ANP) and the research collective, Bellingcat.** Furthermore, there is “intensive collaboration with Netwerk Mediawijsheid and Mediawijs, two network organisations in the Netherlands and Flanders that make efforts to promote media literacy among children, (vulnerable) adults and media professionals” (Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2021).

In the Czech Republic, the CEDMO consortium is led by the Charles University (Czechia), and involves eight partners and four subcontractors. Its greatest strength is the diverse team of technical and humanities scientists with **journalists and fact checking professionals.** In the case of **Spain, the IBERIFIER hub is led by the University of Navarra and involves many universities, verification agencies and research centres.**





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In this context, also **The European Fact-Checking Standards Network Project (EFCSN)** has been created as an effort to bring together **fact-checking** and open-source intelligence (OSINT) organizations to discuss and define independence standards for transparency and methodological and journalistic quality that must guide the efforts to combat disinformation. Moreover, Maldita.es and the Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE) coordinate the **media literacy initiatives aimed at journalists and informants** that will be carried out in Spain and Portugal within the IBERIFIER project.

Furthermore, **Greenpeace Spain** has created “**la Biblioteca de desmentidos ambientales**” (**The library of environmental denials**), as a **fact-checking mechanism about ecology and environmental** topics. There is also **Project Comprobado** a collaborative **project between newsrooms of different sizes that have come together to fight against disinformation in both public and political discourse in view of the general election campaign** coordinated by **Maldita.es and First Draft**, to which 16 Spanish media adhered. Through this collaborative project all the media adhered to the project had to sign the **Crosscheck Code of Principles (2019)**. The validity of the verification could bear the **stamp of Crosscheck**.

4.3 Private Actors

In the Czech Republic, they feel that private actors and civil society are doing more than the government, playing the former group a decisive role as well. By private actors under this section we mean mainly **fact-checking organisations**, which are mostly media enterprises. From **journalistic sites** there have also been detected many actions to establish **verification mechanisms for the content they publish**. There seem to be some **collaboration between public actors and social media platforms** to detect and combat fake news, however, these are few. Finally, also some **private firms and foundations** have carried out actions against fake news and to promote media literacy, but these are also few.

In terms of **fact-checking**, there are many **journalistic and media sources** that provide information double checked, through verification tools and labels. For example, the **Trust Project (2021)**, which in 2021 brings together more than 200 media outlets around the world, several Spanish –El País, El Mundo, Heraldo de Aragón, 20 Minutos, Cambio 16 and La Información. These publications work together to build and **develop professional standards that guarantee the accuracy of the information**. Furthermore, in **Spain**, the **Transparency Map** implemented by the Público newspaper (Alonso, 2018), allows the **traceability of the news, providing information on its sources, additional context documents, information on updates**; and **La Chistera** is the fact-checking blog of the El Confidencial Data Unit. Every week they **verify truths, lies and magic tricks of the main protagonists of current political and social affairs**. Also, in **France there is the Decodex**, a website **certification bot** provided by Le Monde; **NosSources**, France Télévisions' new information **transparency tool** (Doucet-Bon, 2021); and **AFP Factuel**, a media that shares **news double-checked** by its own journalists.





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Moreover, there are a handful of **verification organizations** operating on either independent –Maldita.es, Newtral, Verificat–, or integrated into journalistic media –EFE Verifies, Verifies RTVE, in the case of Spain; Manipulátoři.cz and Hoax.cz in the Czech Republic; and Nieuwscheckers.nl and NU.nl in the Netherlands.

In Spain, Newtral and Mediawise, from the Poynter Institute, will launch a **project against disinformation aimed at people over 65 years of age**. Newtral.es has been the media specialized in fact-checking chosen to participate in the digital media literacy initiative for Spain. The project includes a **10-day WhatsApp course to teach adults how to spot scams, hoaxes, and fake news on the Internet and social media**. The effectiveness of the program will be evaluated by the University of Navarra.

Furthermore, in 2019 **Newtral Education** was launched by the fact-checking organization Newtra. It helps **promote critical thinking in schools, institutes, universities** and other training centers. This project is committed to sharing the knowledge and experience of the Newtral team of **journalists, who since 2013 have been verifying data and fact-checking**, following a rigorous methodology, and publishing the data in prime time on TV, on the web and on networks social.

Newtral Education works with some of the most prestigious universities and educational centers at a national and international level. They have given **courses and conferences in public and private universities**, such as the Carlos III University of Madrid, the Complutense University or the Polytechnic University of Valencia. Likewise, Spain participates in various research projects with multidisciplinary teams from the universities of Barcelona, Cardiff or Bologna, among others. Furthermore, one of the two most important **private media groups in the country, A3Media**, has changed the mission of its foundation and is going to dedicate itself exclusively to projects related to **media literacy and the fight against disinformation and hate speech in children and adolescents**.

In the Netherlands, Nieuwscheckers.nl, a student-centric project operating from the University of Leiden fact-checks news articles and **Nieuwscheckers.nl and NU.nl** (the most viewed news website in the Netherlands) **collaborate with Facebook in detecting fake news**. Also, the project **NuChekt is a fact-checking initiative** from the Dutch news agency NU.nl..

Not only are media communication platforms offering services to deal with disinformation, but also **private companies and other private actors** are doing so. In the **Czech Republic**, companies like **Semantic Visions and Cogniware**, provide **tools to fight and dismantle fake news**. In the **Netherlands**, the **#StopHateforProfit** campaign joined by a number of Dutch companies, including **Unilever and Woonwinkel**, with the scope to **push Facebook to do more against fake news** and racism on its platforms (NL Times, 2020). In terms of **media literacy, in Spain, Be Critical** is an educational program for media competence and critical thinking offered by **Educaixa**, and includes a pedagogical orientation guide **for first and second level students of compulsory secondary education** (Van Helvoort, 2021).





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In Spain, also, technological platforms have programs, developed with varying success: Google (Surfing the net -training 27,000 young people between the ages of 8 and 18 against disinformation, (In)form yourself and **Meta-Facebook** (GeneraZion) and **Tik Tok** (You are in control, Tik Tok Tips).

In the **Czech Republic, Foundation Open Society Fund and media agencies in CR** (Vodafone, T-mobile, Česká spořitelna) have created disinformation sites automatically or at the request of advertisers excluded from placing ads. Moreover, **Manipulátoři.cz** has **fact-checking as its main activity**, as well as, debunking hoaxes, politicians' statements and other disinformation; they also point out scams (fake competitions, fraudulent e-shops and products), regular monitoring of disinformation scene, media education and other initiatives dealing **with media literacy and fighting disinformation**.

Nadační fond nezávislé žurnalistiky (Foundation for Independent Journalism) carries out an independent assessment of the **credibility of Czech news websites** based on compliance with journalistic standards, intention is to provide an overview of how the analysed media handle and deliver information to readers, as well as a guide for companies advertising in specific media (their tool Media rating classifies Czech media into several categories including Market-driven media and Anti-system media). Another website, **Hoax.cz**, **informs users about the pitfalls they encounter on a daily basis** and that make their normal use of the Internet uncomfortable or threatening.

Moreover, in view of the current warfare situation and the persistence of **hybrid threats** on February 25 2022, the **Czech domain management association CZ. NIC**, decided to block eight disinformation sites.

In terms of research done on the disinformation situation, **in Spain**, fundación Luca de Tena have committed themselves to the proliferation of research and training activities aimed at studying and mitigating the effect of disinformation. The framework in which this research takes place, in fact, has been possible thanks, precisely, to the joint effort of the **Luca de Tena Foundation and Facebook**. The objective of this project is to analyze, among others, the **anthropological and historical aspects that cause this disinformation**, as well as its expansion process and the current situation, to try to **offer a proposal for solutions**. The research, to which 62,000 euros will be allocated, is aimed at Spanish universities, both public and private, through their faculties of Humanities or Social Sciences, which may present a research proposal in accordance with the bases (META, 2019).

Further, a Study on disinformation in Spain UTECA was made, it was a **survey** developed by the Unión de Televisiónes Comerciales de **España (UTECA) and the University of Navarra**. The results of this research will also serve for the work of the Group of Experts on the fight against disinformation and the promotion of digital literacy, promoted by the European Commission (EDMO), as well.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

As we can see in the NATO summit of this year, disinformation has been considered a international security problem and some countries, such as Spain, have already included **disinformation campaigns as a "serious threat to electoral processes"** in their National Security Strategy (ESN21). Also, we have argued that disinformation is a **source of polarization in society and created loss of trust in institutions by citizens** (Gobierno de España, 2021). Moreover, in all of the countries of our sample, except the Netherlands, **the trust in governments has decreased in the last years, as well as in the media**. On the one hand, **trust has been lost in governments as actors able to cope with fake news**. On the other hand, **politics is the force that creates distrust in the media**, mainly in **Eastern European countries**, where the political elites are believed to **exert their influence on traditional media platforms as well as make use of the new media platforms** (eg. social media) with a propagandistic and misleading purpose.

In consequence, the **number of initiatives, especially from civil society and the private sector, are rising and they are active in offering specialized trainings and public conferences and debates**, often in the context of increasing qualifications in media literacy and critical thinking. However, they are mostly **targeted at younger generations** at schools, while **seniors have been given less attention**. Most of the initiatives are also focused **on improving digital competences and the use of communication platforms**, but **few are really focused on providing the necessary tools for being able to detect disinformation**. Even fewer initiatives or platforms are present in terms of providing channels to report and denounce fake news. Moreover, a higher emphasis is needed on teaching on the **dissemination of fake news on social media platforms**, as we have seen in the context of the report that these are the sources through which disinformation spreads the most rapidly. What's even more important, as noted by some countries, such as the Czech Republic, **disinformation campaigns are most frequently shared on social sites and via e-mail and seniors aged 65 and older are the most active senders of e-mail spam, whether true or false**. As **users get older, they spread spam significantly more than younger users**. Also, in France they noticed that the **attitudes towards trusting media differ between seniors and younger adults**.

Consequently, from a **national standpoint**, it is necessary to **raise awareness** of the risk of **disinformation targeted at seniors**, by including this vulnerable group into the national strategies and actions plans. Such are the **National Security Strategy of Spain and the education law LOMLOE**, or the **action plans in digital competences**, that right now focus mainly on the youth and their trainers, such as the **Spanish Digital Agenda 2025** and the **"Digital Bulgaria 2025"**. Also, the governments have carried out campaigns to make the population aware of disinformation, such as the **platform #conprueba**, specifically for health issues, in Spain. Then a special **campaign**



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or website could also be implanted for fake news to which seniors are specifically vulnerable and so combat disinformation and hoaxes to which they are more susceptible or those that they tend to be a target of, eg. political hoaxes, health fakes news, etc.

In addition, some of the initiatives that we have seen along the report are focused on the collective subject of this report, the elderly, and can be used as **good practices for other countries**. Such is the case of the Spanish project of **Newtral and Mediawise**, from the Poynter Institute, against disinformation aimed at people over 65 years of age. The project includes a **10-day WhatsApp course to teach adults how to spot scams, hoaxes, and fake news on the Internet and social media**. In Spain, another project is **EXPERTCLICK is a training program** from Cibervoluntarios.org to provide **older people with free face-to-face and online courses**, the elderly learn to **navigate safely and confidently the Internet and to use their mobile phone or tablet to communicate** by videoconference, do business with their bank, request a medical appointment, shop online or take advantage of their creative leisure time on the net. The free Expertclick **courses last 6 hours divided into 2 or 3 sessions**, and can be face-to-face or online. In this course the elderly learn about **video calls and WhatsApp** (2 hours), management for day to day: health and online banking (2 hours) and about **entertainment and leisure apps: social networks** (2 hours). It's important to note that these initiatives focus on the training on fake news as well as learning how to use social media platforms responsibly.

Also, campaigns as the one created by **OSI, INCIBE** (National Cybersecurity Institute) in Spain for seniors, **“Experiencia Senior”**, which offers a **blog with information, videos, tests and exercises** to make learning about disinformation interactive and dynamic for the elderly. In the Czech Republic, **Project Fakt?** (since March 2020), implemented within the framework of the Active Citizens Fund programme, aims to support civil society and strengthen the capacity of non-profit organisations, such as **Elpida, an organization dedicated to the education of seniors**. They provide an up-to-date **center for educational and social activities and a meeting point for seniors**. Here, seniors have access to exercise rooms and various **educational workshops and classes**, such as **computer literacy and memory training**. Also, they offer a **free helpline, hotline and crisis intervention service** for seniors and caretakers of the elderly. This is important as there are few means for the elder to **share the experience with fake news** and help lines could be useful for them to understand how to act in such situations and provide them with the empowerment to self-respond.

Moreover, another important tool to stop disinformation are **awareness campaigns, workshops and seminars**, such as the one from the **AEPUM: Workshops Against Disinformation for the elder**. Via Círculo Jefferson, with the collaboration of the US Embassy and universities for the elderly associated with AEPUM, the association organizes five conferences in five different cities and universities in Spain on how to detect and combat disinformation, in a hybrid format of face-to-face and/or remote attendance.





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In addition to the previous initiatives specifically targeted at elderly, some projects that are targeted on other groups of society can also be adapted to help fight disinformation aimed at seniors. For example, in Cyprus, the **'European Media Coach Initiative' (EMCI)**, has trained teachers and other professionals in young people's empowerment when dealing with multiple challenges of the information society and the media, the internet, and social media (in particular). Providing valuable insight into the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours that are required for safe and responsible digital experiences, the **programme's goal was to promote active citizenship via critical thinking** (Paideia News, 2021). In this case, teachers could be trained to show senior people on how to deal with the same challenges and promote an active citizenship with critical thinking among them as well.

Another project in Cyprus could also be adopted to the elderly, such is the **CYberSafety'European project**. This initiative brings together key national stakeholders with the aim of creating a secure internet culture, empowering creative, innovative and critical citizens in the digital society. In Cyprus, stakeholders aim at contributing to the European efforts for battling disinformation, through an **awareness platform** (containing information, resources, and helpful tools), as well as through **shared experience, expertise, and good practices**. Through this project, Cyprus also hopes to provide **quality and quantitative feedback on online safety issues** for children. To achieve this, a **Helpline function has been activated**: users can get advice and support from qualified and trained real-time assistants and scientists on issues related to the use of online technologies. From this initiative we can extract three main ideas applicable to the elderly, **the creation of an awareness platform with experiences and good practices; the measuring of the effect and usefulness of the same to safeguard seniors online experience; and a helpline to which they can turn to when finding themselves threatened by fake news**.

Lastly, from Cyprus and the Czech Republic, the project **Youth MythBusters (YMB)** can also be inspiring for this project as it aims at promoting, in this case for the youth, the engagement and enhance critical thinking and media literacy in order to strengthen democracy and fight manipulation, propaganda and fake news. A capacity building programme will **train young influencers to become active citizens, to assume the role of leader in the civic and democratic life, and to face the challenges of the new media era**. The action carried out by this organization can serve as role model to create similar actions to **train senior influencers to become active citizens** against disinformation. Some of the actions that can be transposed by this association to the seniors group are:

- **Training material for Leaders:** A training material for senior influencers, developed **on how to enable their peers (other vulnerable people 55+) to increase their civic and political engagement through media literacy and critical thinking**. The content is divided into thematic areas, including: identification of fake news, propaganda and manipulation, teaching media literacy skills to young vulnerable people, promoting civic and political engagement.

- **A National Advisory Groups:** consists of 3-5 experienced senior influencers and activists and provide **guidance to the leaders for the development and implementation of peer-to-peer engagement.**
- **E-Learning Platform:** The e-learning platform will serve both as **an e-learning tool for the influencers and as an online space**, where vulnerable people could communicate with influencers in order to establish a strong network and to facilitate their cooperation. Also, digital modules would be available on how to counter manipulation, populism, propaganda and fake news.

Another way to reach the elderly on disinformation is true actions such as the one in Bulgaria, the **“Online Media Literacy Program for Adults and Mentors of Local Communities”** which aims at **training mentors in local communities** (including **union leaders and health mediators**), as well as **vulnerable groups (the elderly 55+, children)** who have access to the internet but have not yet developed the **skills to browse safely**. By training mentores of the elderly on disinformation, preparing the latter against fake news would be much easier.

Also, as said before more workshops should be organized for seniors as well as tools provided to their educators, this means creating **train-the-trainers initiatives with the target group being seniors**. For example, in Spain and Bulgaria, some organizations have been involved in the project **Get Your Facts Straight**, where the main outcome was **a toolkit for educators and trainers, to teach media literacy through disinformation workshops for young people** and their parents. The document includes learning objectives, training outline, learning materials, recommendations, and lessons learned from a pilot test. The same happened in France with La **Ligue de l'enseignement**, which published the educational course "Les veilleurs de l'info". Since then, nearly 150 trainers have been trained in the use of this course, and have themselves trained 800 education professionals and associative members, and made nearly 1500 young people aware of the fight against fake news and conspiracy theories.

Furthermore, more workshops and promotional **activities could be carried out in universities for the elderly**, as we have seen with the organization in Spain AEPUM. An example is the launch in 2019 of Newtral Education by the **fact-checking organization Newtra. It helps promote critical thinking in schools, institutes, universities and other training centers**. This project is committed to sharing the knowledge and experience of the Newtral team of journalists, who since 2013 have been verifying data and fact-checking, following a rigorous methodology, and publishing the data in prime time on TV, on the web and on social networks. Newtral Education works with some of the most prestigious universities and educational centers at a national and international level. They have given courses and conferences in public and private universities.

Moreover, not only universities for seniors could be places to reach this target group, but also **retirement homes could be ideal places to form educators in topics of fake news**. Many of the initiatives we have seen in the report talk about **preparing educators for schools**, focused on the youth. However, the activity carried out, for example, by the **Library Cooperation Council in Spain**, that formed **the Information Literacy working group**, for the **Integration of IL/AMI skills in the educational system**, could be extrapolated to senior homes. The Information Literacy Working Group has the aim of allowing and facilitating the real integration of media, **digital and informational competence in the day-to-day activities of educational centres**.

To sum up some of the further activities that can be carried out in the action against disinformation and mentioned as already mentioned by the EU AGE PLATFORM (Age Platform Europe, 2022) are:

- Involve social media and public institutions in fact checking
- Trust civil society in carrying out actions and work with them in scaling-up solutions
- Enable interdisciplinary exchanges across countries and fund social initiatives to support older people to build up trust
- Policy makers need to be transparent, open and communicate better
- Mandate to be transparent who is behind producing content
- Support diversity of media

Finally, one thing that has been remarked is the **lack of metrics to measure the impact that the initiatives** on disinformation have had. This is important to track the progress made and the efficiency of the activities carried out. This has been already demanded even by law, such as with the **Ley General de Comunicación Audiovisual in Spain**, which stipulates that the competent agents in audiovisual communication “shall adopt measures for the acquisition and development of media literacy capacities in all sectors of society, to citizens of all ages and for all means, and **will periodically evaluate the progress made**” (BOE. Ley 13/2022, de 7 de julio, General de Comunicación Audiovisual).

Some of the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that can serve as example and have been brought up are represented in the following table:





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IDENTIFIED KPIs	RESULTS:
	Project MediaWise US
How often MediaWise course enrollees researched headlines to <u>check for accuracy</u> compared to the time prior to taking the course	69,9%
How often MediaWise course enrollees <u>accurately classified stories as true or false</u> after taking the course	84,9%
Percentage point <u>improvement in accuracy</u> compared to before the seniors took the course	21,6%
	Cibervoluntarios foundation (Cibervoluntarios.org, n.d.)
Number of <u>people trained annually</u>	63,000
	La Ligue de l'enseignement, course : " Les veilleurs de l'info "
Number of <u>trainers have been trained</u>	150
Number of <u>trained education professionals and associative members by trainers</u>	800
Number of <u>young people made aware of the fight against fake news</u>	1500
	First Draft (First Draft, 2021) (Q2 2021)
Number of <u>people trained quarterly</u>	3.704
Number of <u>training events</u>	38
Number of <u>English-language fact-checks</u>	900% (Brennen, et al. 2020) more from January to March
Number of <u>website visitors</u>	245.396





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	Meta, Google, Microsoft, TikTok, Twitter (European Commission, n.d.)
Suspended accounts that did not follow the policy on misleading information about COVID-19 of Twitter.	527
Number of ad removals and blocked advertisements related to the coronavirus by Google.	33.882.679
Prevention of advertiser submissions targeting European markets, some with vaccine-related content (Microsoft).	9.022.800
Facebook's COVID-19 Information Hub visitors, monthly comparison . Number of visitors to Bing COVID-19 (Microsoft)	21.8 million visitors down in March and April compared to January and February. 1,220,020 fewer visits in March and April compared to the previous reference period.
	National and Internationally (Open Society Institute Sofia [OSI], 2021).
Change in scores of Media Literacy ¹ annually (from 2019 to 2021)	Spain: -1 point France: -1 point Netherlands: -3 points Czech Republic: +3 points Cyprus: -1 point Bulgaria: -3 points

¹ The model employs several indicators that correspond to different aspects related to media literacy: Level of education, state of the media, trust in society and the usage of new tools of participation, which seem to be the predictors of media literacy.

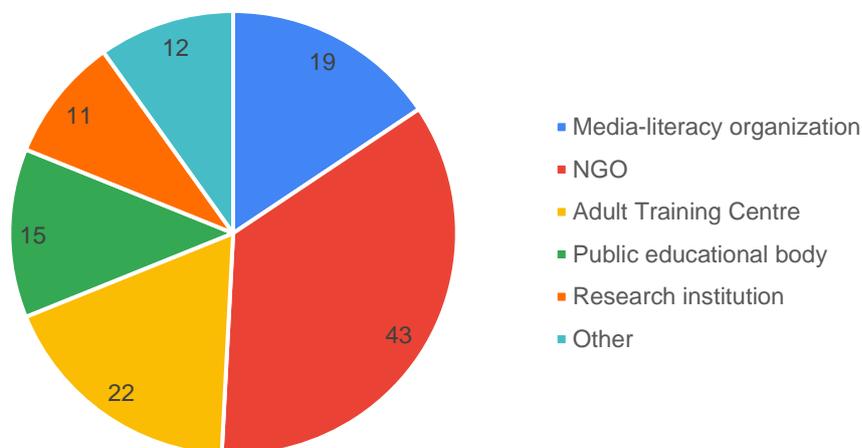
6. Survey Results: Trainer's skills on Fake News for adults 55+

In order to enhance adults' media literacy skills and to support adults' educators in developing innovative training approaches, the questionnaire *Trainer's skills on Fake News for adults 55+* was developed to assess the knowledge and skills of trainers on the topics of fake news and disinformation and the current educational practices in this field. The six countries showcased the results about the perceived needs in relation to the topics mentioned above, which will be used in the project as an important input for developing a manual tailored to trainers' needs.

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

The knowledge and skills of trainers on the topics of fake news and disinformation

1. Please indicate where you currently work.



As we can see in the graph, the majority of them (43) work at non-governmental organisations (NGO). This group is followed by those working in Adult Training Centres (22) and the ones in Media-literacy organizations (19). Those working in Research institutions, are the minority (11). Between these two groups, we find people who works in Public educational bodies (15) and other categories (12).

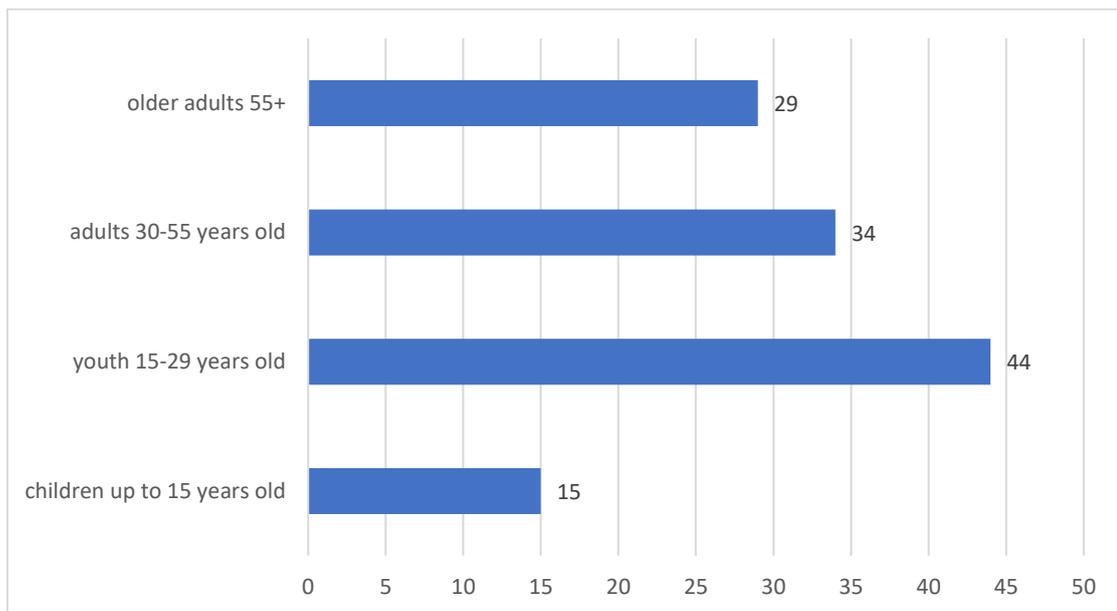
2. If you replied Other in the previous question, please mention the type of organization/ company you work for.



The responses collected were as follows:

Bulgaria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical consulting and staff sourcing company providing specialized ICT services and staff to organizations
Czech Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University + public courses • Grammar school + University + Online courses for future teachers and seniors • Adult-education company
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physics university support professor and Interim Management y Digital marketing teacher
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemployed • Users' association • Media education association • Association • Association working on improving seniors' ICT skills • Social centre

3. What is the main target group you offer your trainings at?

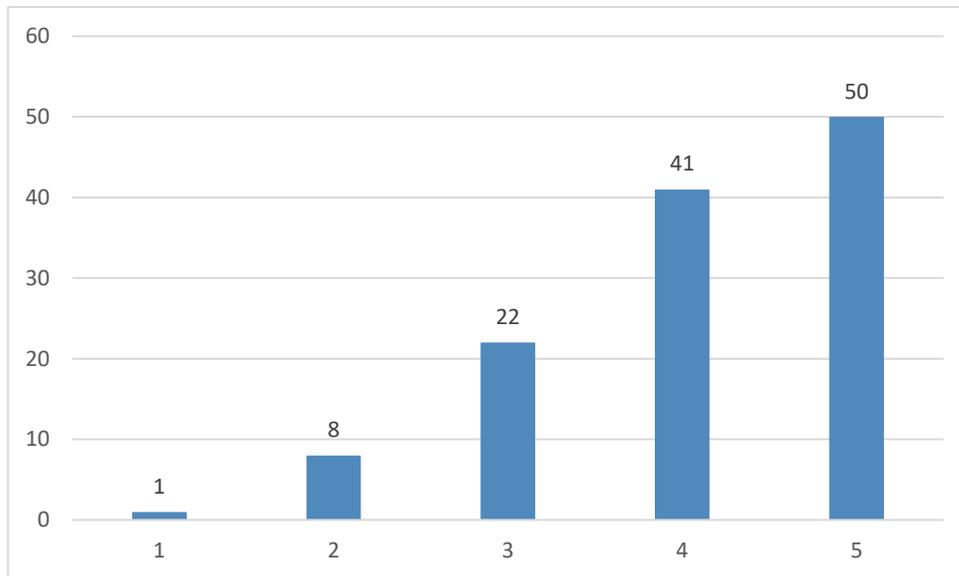


44 respondents provide trainings to the group between 15 and 29 years old, 34 respondents to the group between 30 and 55 years old, and the minority groups are those over 55 (29) and under 15 (15).



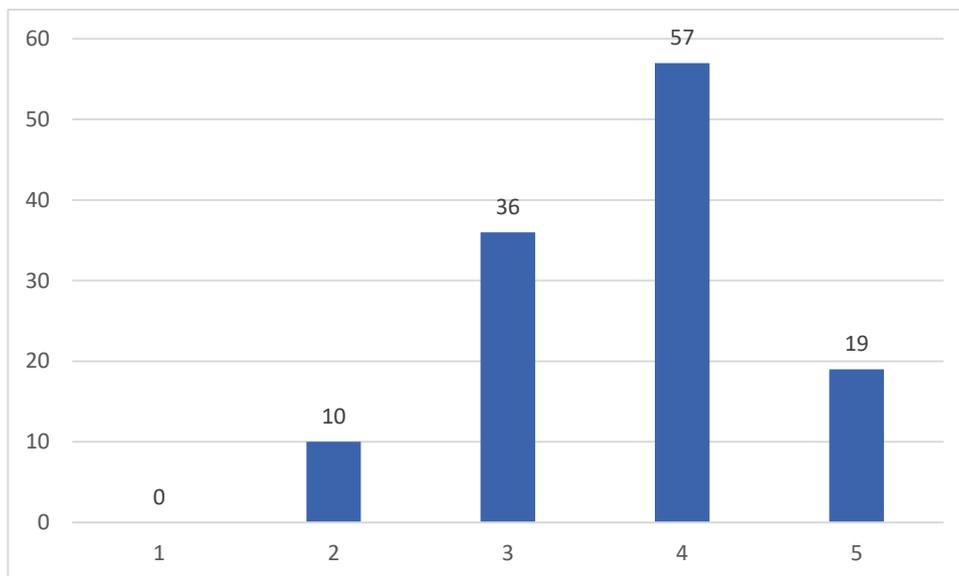
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4. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I am familiar with the concepts of misinformation, disinformation and fake news?



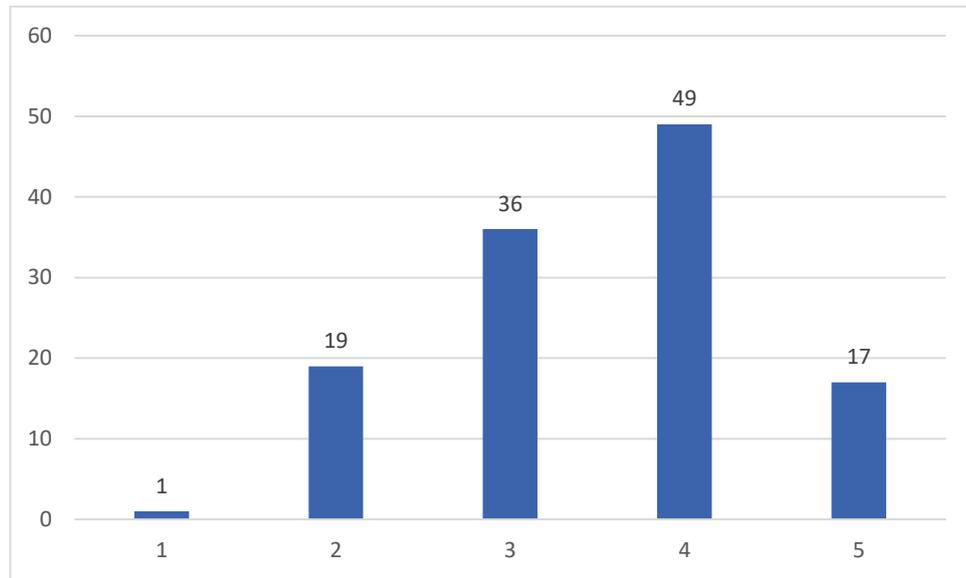
The answers show, that most of them are familiar with the concepts of misinformation, disinformation and fake news (50), and only one person is not familiar with them.

5. How often do you come across news or information that you believe misinterpret reality or is even false? (1 = never, 5 = always)



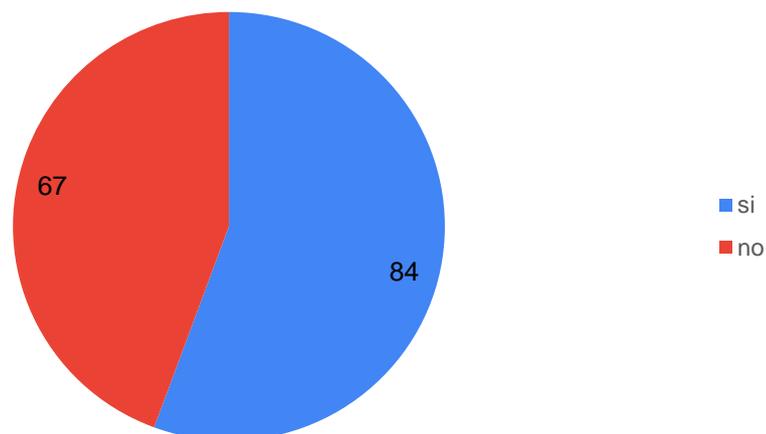
In this question, 57 people chose option 4, the most voted option, followed by option 3, where 36 people voted for it. We can assume that the majority of respondents encounter fake news with a fairly high frequency.

6. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I am confident that I am able to identify news or information that misrepresent reality or is even false. (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)



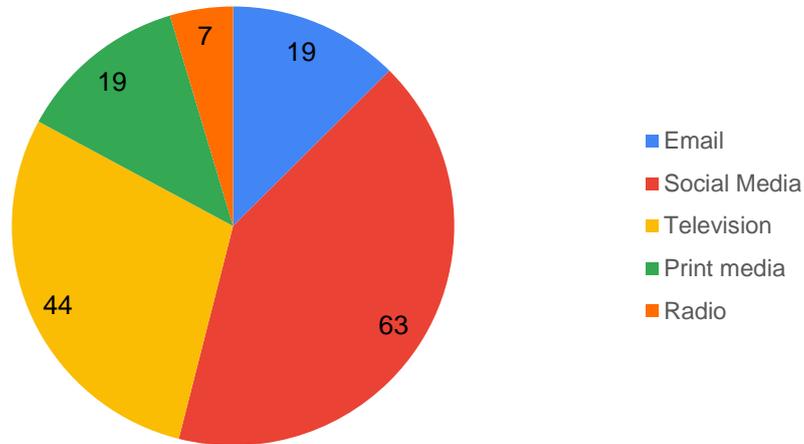
The majority of the respondents (49) consider themselves at a level 4 out of 5 able to identify fake news, they are followed by 36 people who place themselves at level 3. We can assume that the majority of respondents see themselves as able to identify fake news.

7. Do you consider yourself susceptible to fake news as a trainer?



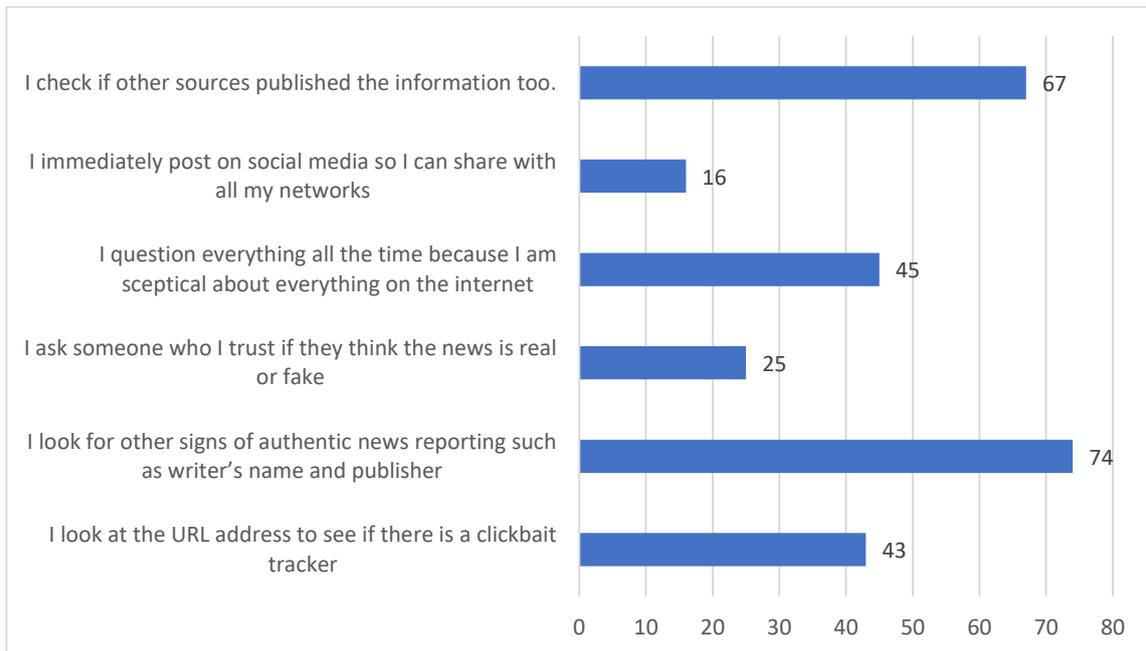
As a trainer 84 out of 151 consider themselves susceptible to fake news.

8. Where do you usually come across fake news?



In this chart, we can see that the majority of people (63) consider that social media is where they find the most fake news. This is followed by Television (44), next to Print media and email (19) and finally the radio.

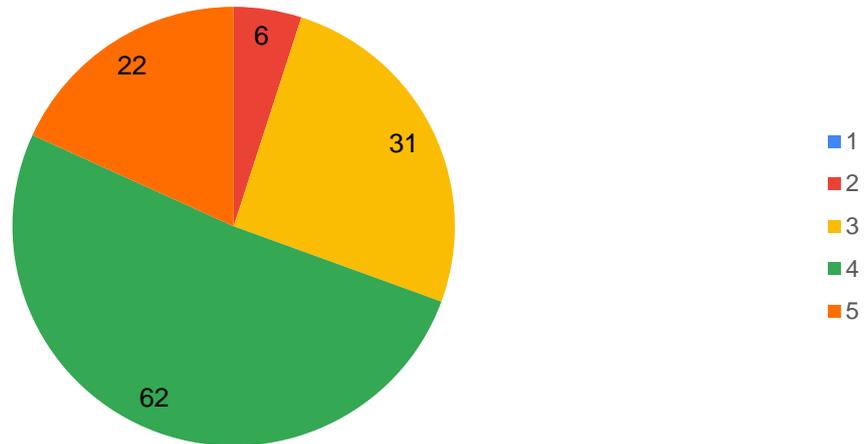
9. How do you know if what you're reading is accurate and reliable? (Multiple choices possible)



The most voted option (74) is "to look for other signs of authentic news reporting such as writer's name and publisher", followed by "checking if other sources published the information too" (67). The next one most voted is "to question everything all the time because I am sceptical about everything on the internet" (45) and "to look at the URL address to see if there is a clickbait tracker" (43). The two least voted are "to ask

someone who I trust if they think the news is real or fake” (25) and “to immediately post on social media so I can share with all my networks” (16).

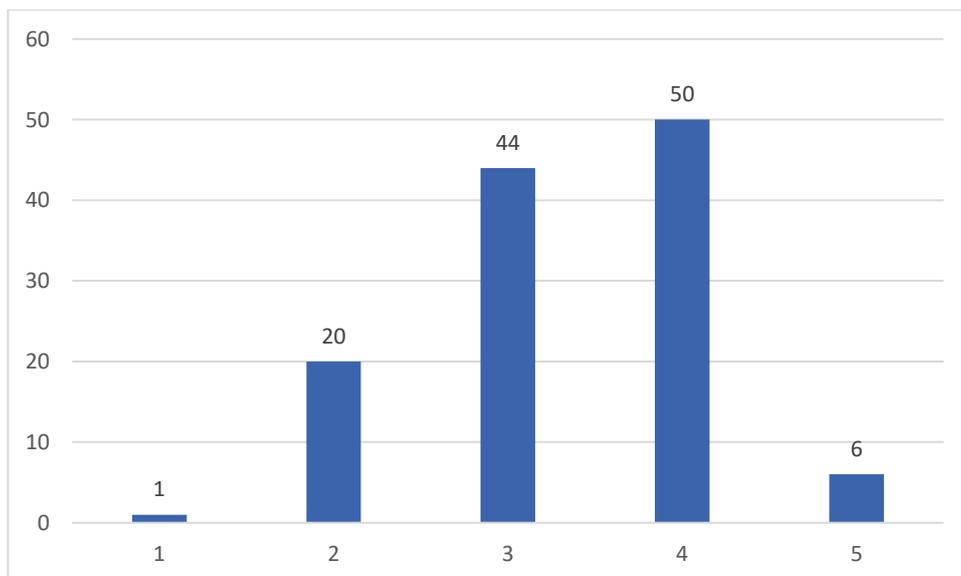
10. How often do you think your students encounter fake news and disinformation? (1 = never, 5 = always)



As we can see in this chart, the majority of them (62) have voted 4, followed by number 5 (22) and number 3 (31). Number 2 is the least voted option (6), and nobody chose number 1. It says that respondents encounter disinformation very often.

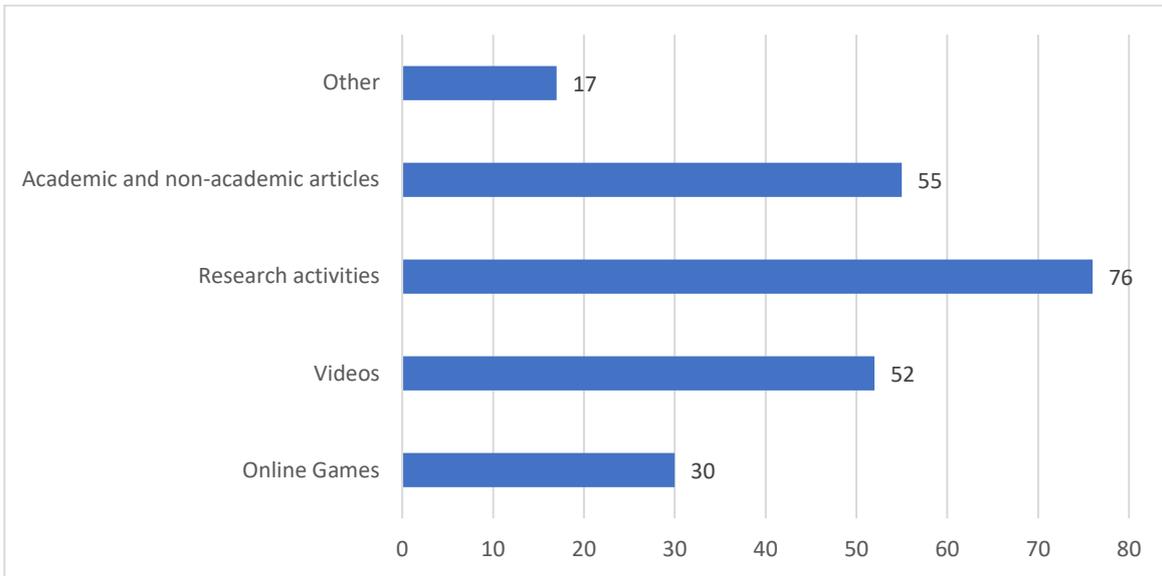
The fight of trainers against fake news: courses, training methods and tools

11. How often are learners referring to fake news (Intentionally or unintentionally) in your trainings/courses? (1 = never, 5 = always)



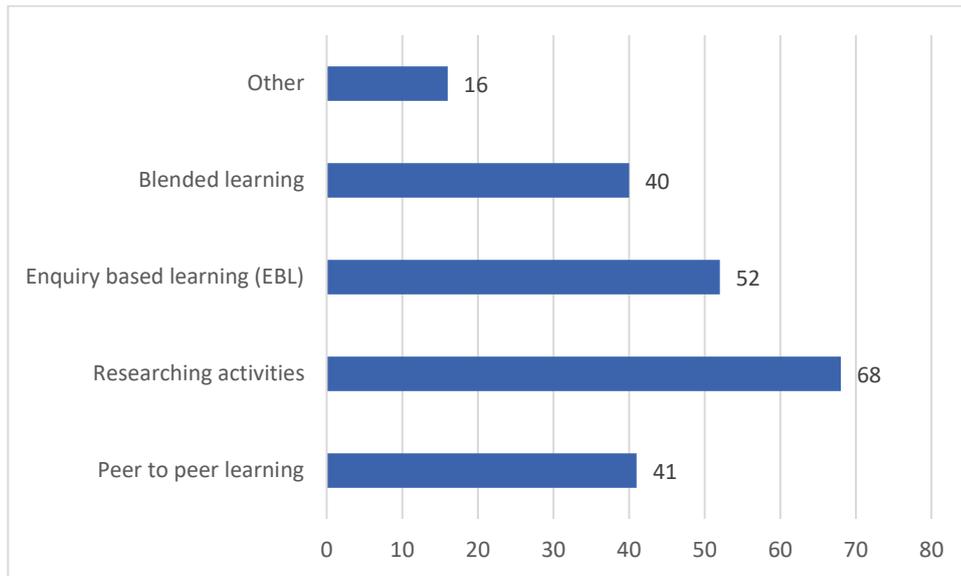
The most popular option with 50 votes is number 4, followed by number 3 with 44 votes and number 2 with 20. Number 5 has 6 votes and number 1, 1 vote. We can suppose that most of the time learners refer to fake news in trainings/courses.

12. What kind of tools do you use for training your learners to recognize fake news?



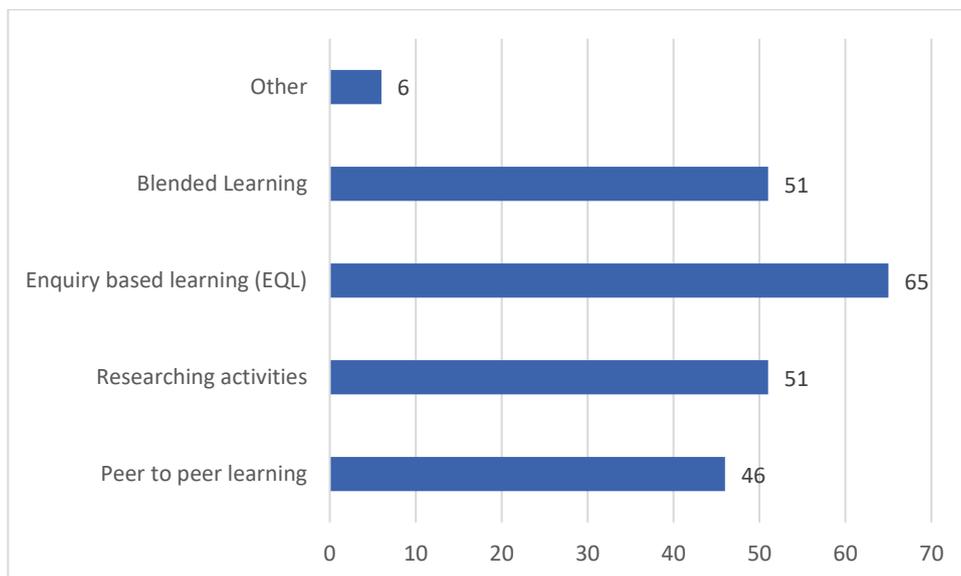
In terms of the tools used to teach learners how to recognise fake news, research activities is the most voted (76), followed by academic and non-academic articles (55). Other commonly used tools include videos (52), online games (30) and other categories (17).

13. What methods do you use to teach your learners about fake news, misinformation, and/or disinformation?



As we can see, researching activities is the most voted option (68), together with Enquiry based learning (EBL) (52). These are followed by peer to peer learning (41) and blended learning (40). The least chosen are other categories(16).

14. Which of the below training methods would you like to learn more about?



65 people out of 219 would like to learn more about Enquiry based learning (EBL), it is the most voted option, followed by researching activities and blended learning, both with 51 votes. Peer to peer learning has 46 votes and other categories 6.

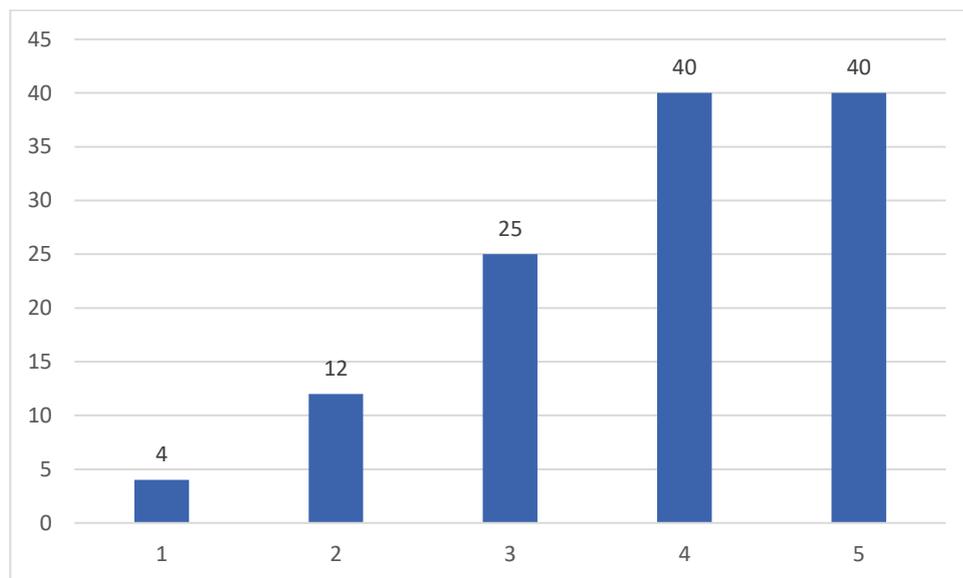
15. If you replied Other in the previous question, please briefly mention the name of the training method you would like to learn more about.

The responses collected were as follows:

Spain	Through videos and interactive examples
France	Through videos and interactive examples

Trainer’s perception on the disinformation among adults aged 55+

16. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: Adults aged 55+ are a vulnerable group when it comes to fake news & disinformation. (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = strongly agree)



Number 4 and 5 were the most voted options, with 40 votes each. They are followed by options 3 and 2, with 25 and 12 votes, and number 1 with 4 votes. We can assume that the majority of the respondents consider adults aged 55+ a vulnerable group when it comes to fake news & disinformation.



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17. How do you assess the delivery of the knowledge on media literacy among the adults aged 55+ (e.g. assessment methods, tests, other)?

The responses collected were as follows:

Bulgaria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Teach students to question what ads tell them</i> • <i>Explain how students can recognize false representations of reality</i> • <i>Show students how the media influences behavior</i> • <i>Give students the means to reveal the "truth" behind advertising</i> • <i>Facebook questionnaire</i> • <i>Online tests</i> • <i>Assessment methods</i>
Cyprus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Influence on re-broadcasting of fake news</i> • <i>Not so complete</i> • <i>There is no delivery of knowledge at all</i> • <i>Assessment methods and tests</i> • <i>Efficient</i> • <i>Students and learners need to be more actively involved in media education</i> • <i>There is no education</i> • <i>There are many gaps</i>
Czech Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Discussion/oral feedback</i> • <i>Questionnaires</i> • <i>Quiz</i> • <i>Interactivity, video and audio experience, more opportunities to identify disinformation.</i>
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Tests</i>
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Weak at the moment, but this will have to change very soon with greater awareness.</i> • <i>Via tests to assess their level of knowledge of certain media, and questionnaires</i> • <i>Testing and evaluation</i> • <i>The dissemination is quite poor due to lack of information</i> • <i>Knowledge is still quite poor because there are not enough methodologies to teach seniors about fake news.</i> • <i>There is a lot of information on media education, but adults over 55 are not necessarily interested in it or do not seek it out.</i> • <i>I will say that the dissemination is not enough today.</i> • <i>I think there is still a lot to do in this area</i> • <i>More training needs to be created on this subject.</i> • <i>I do not believe that there is a specific training dedicated to this subject and it would therefore be necessary to create one</i>



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>In my education center there is no specific course on this subject. On the other hand, there are explanatory videos on Youtube</i>
Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Tests</i> • <i>Assessment methods</i> • <i>Questionnaire</i>

18. How and where do you approach the target group of adults aged 55+ ?

The responses collected were as follows:

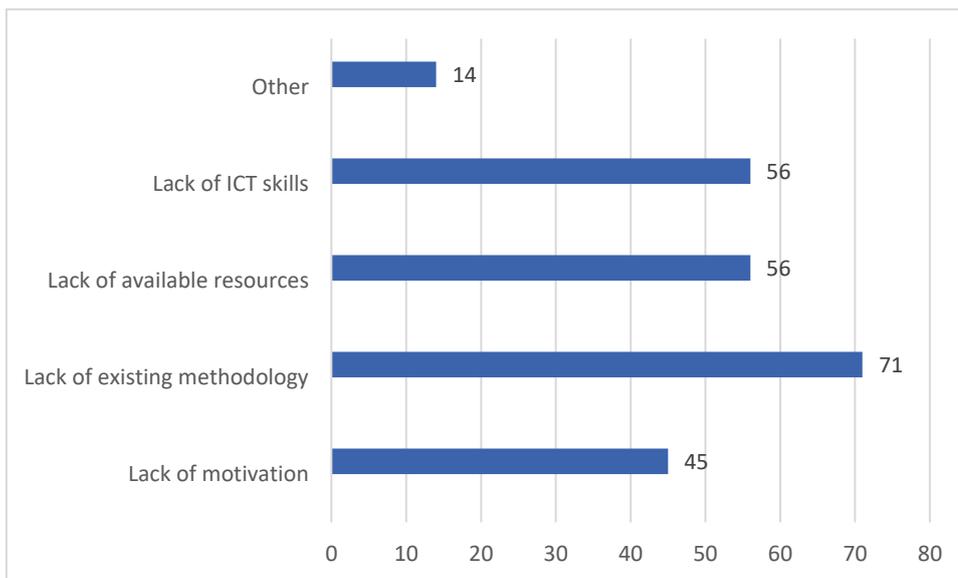
Bulgaria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The best way to approach older adults about the benefits of technology is to show them. Walk them through the simple steps in viewing photos of their family and friends or familiar moments. Demonstrate how easy it is to talk to a friend or relative they haven't seen in years through FaceTime or Skype</i> • <i>Facebook groups</i> • <i>Activity centres</i> • <i>In local communities of small municipalities</i>
Cyprus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Social media</i> • <i>News papers</i> • <i>Lifelong learning educational institutions</i> • <i>Social enterprises</i> • <i>Word of mouth (from my students/ friends / social media/ family)</i>
Czech Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Company courses</i> • <i>Courses</i> • <i>Colleagues</i> • <i>Family</i> • <i>Friends</i> • <i>Social places</i> • <i>University</i>
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Schools, parents associations and companies</i> • <i>School or university conferences</i> • <i>Face to face activities</i> • <i>Videoconference</i>
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>In a playful and non-stressful way</i> • <i>Exchanges, groups, conferences, etc</i> • <i>Training courses specifically addressed to this target group, and through our network of partners and acquaintances</i> • <i>Associations</i> • <i>Via local events in France</i> • <i>Via public institutions</i> • <i>Flyers, newsletter, social centers, town halls</i>
Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Through education</i> • <i>Through researching activities</i>



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through specific connections • Through television • Through connections with higher managerial positions in businesses • Via newspapers
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19. If you have an experience in teaching/explaining about fake news, disinformation what are the main challenges you have encountered in your courses/trainings with adult learners?



The biggest challenge they have encountered in courses/trainings with adult learners is the lack of an existing methodology, with 71 votes. This is followed by the lack of ICT skills (56) and the lack of available resources (56). The least voted options are the lack of motivation (45) and other categories (14).

20. If you replied Other in the previous question, please, briefly explain on what challenges you are referring to.

The responses collected were as follows:

Cyprus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distrust on behalf of students
Czech Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They don't consider technology a part of their everyday life. • Conviction. • At the University we encountered the reluctance of one person to participate. Furthermore, it was a challenge to fight off the shame of the seniors when they were afraid to speak themselves or try to use a tablet etc. because they were ashamed that they would not be able to. • I perceive a certain barrier in the use of technology, e.g. for the possibility of easy transportation by



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	<p>public transport but also the attachment to children and grandchildren (looking after sick grandchildren during the day, picking up grandchildren from kindergarten or school, etc.).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reluctance, shame. • Skeptical approach to information because of the system they experienced when they were young. • Beliefs, rather emotionally based, unwillingness to change attitude. • Inner conviction, block. • Distrust in information in general.
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They believe they are less vulnerable to disinformation.
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of infrastructure and teachers • Lack of resources, lack of managers and trainers, etc.

21. Is there any difference in media literacy among the adults aged 55+ compared to other social groups? / Is this group specific in any way when it comes to media literacy / facing disinformation and fake news?

The responses collected were as follows:

Bulgaria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other social groups are more familiar with technology and digital tools. However adults aged 55+ have been using social media a lot and a survey showed that their cognitive function is improved. However, according to a study published in the journal Science Advances, 11 percent of people aged 65 and older shared fake news on Facebook during the 2016 presidential election, while only 3 percent of people aged 18 to 29 shared falsities. Additionally, more older people also shared fake news than those aged 45 to 65 • Some people cannot use Smart phones properly • Yes because for most 55+ the sole source of information is television • Younger people have easier access to information
Cyprus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, older people are not familiar with new technological means. • There is a difference, older people are not keen on changing their minds. • There is definitely a gap between adults 55+ and other social groups. This is due to lack of media literacy. • Definitely yes. They are not that skilled at spotting fake news. • They are opinionated, they will never accept that they are wrong. • The difference has to do with approaching these people, as older people tend to be more credulous of fake news. They also need greater motivation to join a learning environment.



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<p>Czech Republic</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are more disinformation-prone and more vulnerable. • There are many differences – from faster screen fatigue, to confidence in using technology. • I'm not sure about the 55+ threshold, but let's say for 65+, where they get their information is critical. Usually, it's not Facebook and specific disinformation sites but often what they've learned from friends/acquaintances. That they were told something or forwarded an email. There is also a significant distrust in the public media. • I believe so. It's a group of adults that hasn't been affected by the internet to such an extent and also a group that has grown up in a unified environment. • It is individual. • Adults - they trust "authorities" more, what is written is given, they send fake news by e-mail, computer is not natural for them. Other social groups - more on social media, more used to online space, more skeptical. • Adults use email more, younger people use social networks more. The younger ones have grown up in the computer age, they are more used to this environment, they approach information more critically. • They are more vulnerable to disinformation. • Adults 55+ are less self-confident. • Oral transmission of information. • Young people are more familiar with the world of technology in general. • The time they grew up in. Young people were surrounded by a lot of technological advances, adults grew up in a not very diverse environment. • The young are more sceptical, used to the Internet. Adults trust the printed word more. • Less willing to change their minds, more likely to use email than social networks, more likely to share information verbally. • Big differences in motivation and willingness to learn new things. Working with computers is not intuitive for them. Not knowing English is also a barrier. • Elders are not so familiar with technology and foreign languages, they are less willing to change their world-view and processes. • Elders are more susceptible, disinformation is spread more by e-mail or word of mouth, they are not very interested in new technologies. • Older people are less interested in developments in technology in general, they are more trusting. • Older people send emails rather than follow social networks. They are not familiar enough with the internet environment to navigate well.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Distrust in public media, seeing "one truth", distrust in computers.</i>
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>They are more used to read complete news and get information through several different media: press, radio, TV...They do not usually use the social media as a source of information and rarely exclusively. They usually have more judgment and knowledge than other age groups.</i> • <i>Yes, they are more vulnerable because they are less familiar with social networks and do not usually check the source of the news.</i> • <i>Yes, there are differences, in my opinion because in most situations they have not received the correct training</i>
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Lack of knowledge of the social networks and fake news, lack of awareness of how the fake ones are produced (through artificial intelligence in particular). These concepts are far from the reality of a senior who learned technologies for less time than other younger generations</i> • <i>There is a difference in media literacy for this group (seniors), they are often afraid to use the media and the information presented by it, or do not know where to look for information quickly and clearly.</i> • <i>Yes there is a difference. Seniors have more historical knowledge but are often not comfortable with knowing different media and therefore may not know how to cross-reference sources.</i> • <i>Yes, this group (adults aged 55+) is less accustomed to different types of falsification of information.</i> • <i>For people over 55 the teaching is different, it is important to use simple and easy to understand terms</i> • <i>No there is no difference</i> • <i>I'm not sure there is a difference in terms of vulnerability and influence because young people can be easily manipulated too. However, I would say that there is a problem in terms of access to new technologies and older people are less aware of the dangers that exist on digital media</i> • <i>Adults over the age of 55 are not trained in the media and are afraid of it, which makes them susceptible to misinformation</i> • <i>Yes, we can say that we must ensure that these people have access to computers and basic knowledge of ICTs</i> • <i>It is purely individual</i> • <i>Yes, you need to have specific skills to teach this target audience (seniors): professional qualities, adapted methodologies, etc</i> • <i>Less experience with new media than those "born with"</i> • <i>I don't think it's a matter of age difference but of specific skills of each person</i>



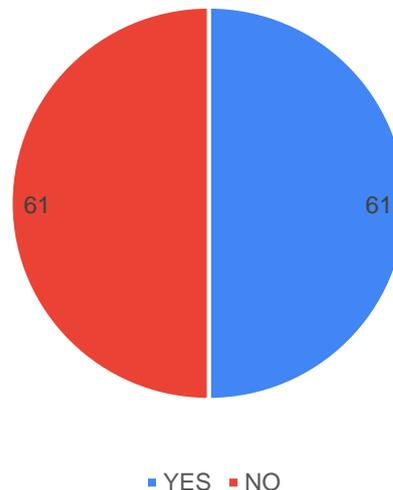


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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some people don't have access to this information, others don't even know it exists. It is important to ensure that people have a basic level of ICT so that they can follow online training and resources
Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many times they could not identify misinformation There is always a media literacy among these 2 groups. I think that aged 55+ facing more difficulties to understand the real news. Definitely, older people are more gullible

Trainer's current skills and training tools

22. Have you ever participated in specific training or followed a course about fake news and disinformation?



50% of them have participated in specific training or followed a course about fake news and disinformation and 50% have not.

23. What did you learn in this training and what methods were used?

The responses collected were as follows:

Bulgaria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critical thinking Non formal education methods
Cyprus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tests Ways of prevention from disinformation and fake news
Czech Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I've only attended one course and it was more of a lecture. It's been a while and I knew a lot of things





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	<p>already, so I'm not sure I can remember anything I learned there or what methods were used. But I'm sure the lecturer mentioned trolls, the problem of closed Facebook groups where users reinforce what they believe and create echo chambers and confirmation bias has a pré. Manipulation of photographs, etc. I remember it being very disturbing. Because it was a lecture and the lecturer was showing one disinformation after another with people's comments and examples of how people actually believed it and I know I was quite depressed about it when it was crammed like that.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactive seminar with videos and texts. However, I was not impressed with the course, I found it confusing. • How to verify images and videos, how to teach through play, how to challenge students' beliefs. • Basic terms + practical part: how to verify sources. • Methodology, lecture. • Photo manipulation, information about trolls, examples of disinformation campaigns. • The course wasn't attractive, it was confusing. • Verification of videos and photos, eureka moment. • Basic terms and how to recognize disinformation. • OSINT (Open Source Intelligence), photo geolocation and chronolocation, Reverse Image Search, statistics and data manipulation. • Tools for identifying the origin of photos and videos, quizzes. • RIS, real-life examples. • Real-life- examples, verifying images and videos, terms.
<p>Spain</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conferences on combating fake news. Theoretical point. • The lack of knowledge that exists regarding this formation. The methods used were: theoretical part and group activities.
<p>France</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Videos, explanatory posters. A simple, illustrated, non-agonizing method • URL check • Mixed lessons between sending detailed documents and detailed explanations from tutors during face-to-face lessons with digital media • Existing methodology, theoretical basis etc • Ideas for lessons, interactive and fun materials
<p>Netherlands</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to identify fake news • I followed the training so as to be possible for me to teach this topic to my students. I learned a lot



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	<p><i>of practices especially about threats on the internet</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Definitions and ways to identify them. Training was done by a presentation, a small workshop and a 3D game quiz.</i>
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24. How did it help you to deliver the skills and knowledge on media literacy to the adults aged 55+?

The responses collected were as follows:

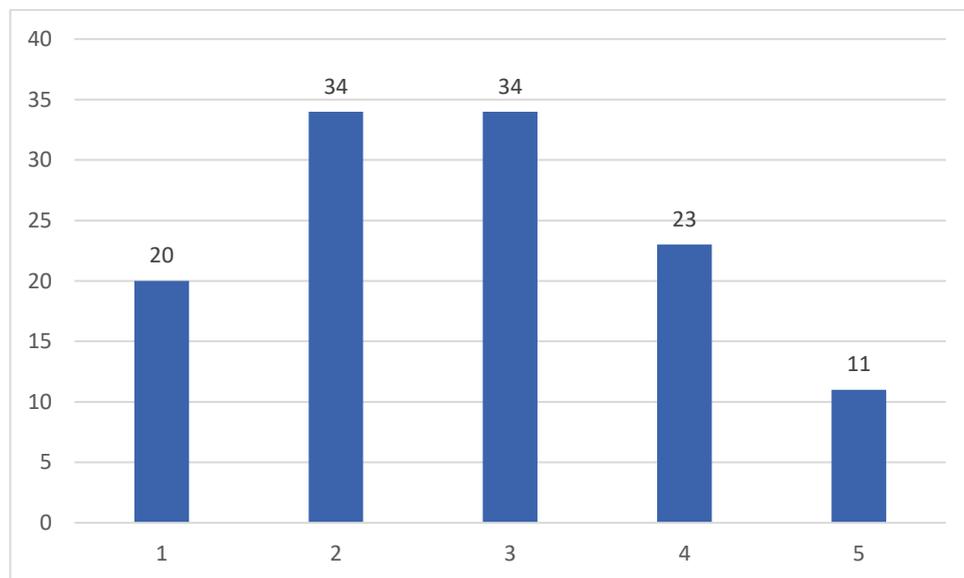
Bulgaria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>They started being more suspicious about what they read and were more aware of Data protection when it comes to web research</i> • <i>Via face to face training</i> • <i>Workshops</i>
Cyprus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>It played an important role</i> • <i>I found the way to educate adults in a way that they can filter any kind of information they received from the media.</i>
Czech Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Not methodologically but every information broadens your horizons. Plus it's always good to meet people who are interested in the same subject.</i> • <i>I borrowed some examples of photo manipulation or rather, video. The lecturer pointed out that screenshots of video are often used, taken out of context and used in a different context as photographs. These photos are not immediately verifiable because they were originally video. So it's kind of a trick.</i> • <i>Not too much, I wouldn't be able to pass information about disinformation this way, how to work with it, where to verify...</i> • <i>New perspective, new inspiration.</i> • <i>I was inspired by some of the tasks and incorporated them into my teaching.</i> • <i>New information, contacts to people working in media literacy.</i> • <i>Examples to be used in my courses (photo, video).</i> • <i>I didn't make use of it.</i> • <i>New perspective.</i> • <i>New ideas, more playful form.</i>



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Tips for tools and best-practices, greater self-confidence.</i> • <i>Experience of another lecturer, new tools.</i> • <i>Contacts, new tools.</i> • <i>Self-study.</i> • <i>Inspiration.</i>
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>It is necessary to provide a simple and clear communication and training, adapting to the knowledge of the group.</i>
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Awareness of this problem, made materials available</i> • <i>Through research activities</i> • <i>I had a clearer idea for my training</i>
Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>With the appropriate tools</i> • <i>Currently working on adapting the 3D quiz game from the training to our own target groups and context.</i>

25. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: From my experience, the number of trainings offered to adult learners on fake news and disinformation is sufficient? (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)



Most of them voted 2 and 3 in the range (34 votes each), which means that most of them strongly disagree that enough training is offered to adults learners on fake news. The rest of the most voted scores have been number 4 (23) and number 1 (20). Number 5 is the one that got the fewest votes (11).



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