RESILIENCE TO DISINFORMATION – RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EU POLICIES

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WORLD YOUTH ALLIANCE SOUTH EAST EUROPE
PROJECT DECIDE

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Introduction

A deep awareness of the pace and technological progress of the present day encourages us to think about the excessive amount of information that is transmitted to the world daily in this digital age. Among the numerous pieces of information, there is also a great deal of disinformation, creating extremely difficult circumstances for verifying its accuracy and credibility, which is the reason why the DECIDE project was launched.

DECIDE – Democratic Engagement through Critical Information Discernment and Education, is a two-year project funded by the EU under CERV-2023-CITIZENS-CIV, and led by the association In the Name of the Family (Croatia), with partners from Austria, Lithuania, and Croatia, implemented from June 2024 to May 2026. As part of the project, a three-day conference was held in Brussels from November 19 to 21, 2025, entitled "How to DECIDE on Future Policies", as the seventh event in the project.

The discussions revolved around a number of tools that can be used to check unacceptable situations and circumstances related to disinformation. A proper verification of information requires setting aside time and having the will to do it, but also independence from any political party, ideology, or public actor. In addition to the aforementioned verification, it is necessary to think critically, as well as to consider the context of the information received, and this is possible with a high level of media literacy. In addition to all of the above, one of the primary goals of the project is to provide for an active and impartial dialogue between EU citizens and decision-makers regarding political priorities after the 2024 European Parliament elections.

As already mentioned, the project leader is the association In the Name of the Family (Croatia), and the partners are: Plattform Christdemokratie (Austria), Ateitininkų Federation (Lithuania), and the World Youth Alliance Southeast Europe (Croatia), also the organizer of the Brussels conference. The conference in the European Parliament brought together more than 30 MEPs, partner representatives, journalists and media professionals, civil society representatives and NGO leaders from Croatia, Lithuania, and Austria, as well as experts in media literacy, disinformation, digital communication, and EU policy-making.

During the conference, through structured discussions, panels, and round tables participants exchanged observations, experiences, concerns, and suggestions related to the impact of disinformation on democratic processes and the citizens' everyday life. **The conclusions and recommendations contained in this document are a direct result of this process of joint reflection and dialogue.**

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Conference in Brussels

The Brussels conference featured discussions on the topics related to European policy-making in the post-truth era. Furthermore, the panels, discussions, and round table included discussions on misinformation and disinformation as a threat to the European democratic process, DSA, the importance of recognizing disinformation and education for media literacy, censorship and freedom of speech, media discourse in relation to civil society, human rights and freedoms and possible threats to these same rights and freedoms, strengthening the institutional and regulatory framework, emphasizing the objectivity of fact-checkers, emphasizing the importance of media education of citizens (especially the youngest) and shaping their own attitude as a basis for making informed decisions, with concrete examples in the field of current politics, art, culture, and journalism.

A special value of the conference lay in the active participation of citizens and representatives of civil society, who, along with experts and political actors, participated equally in the discussions. Through an open dialogue, specific concerns of citizens were highlighted, as well as proposals for solutions that were later shaped into recommendations for European policies.



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Recommendations

The following recommendations represent the joint conclusions and proposals of the participants of the three-day conference "How to DECIDE on Future Policies", held in Brussels from November 19 to 21, 2025 as part of the DECIDE project.

1. Strengthening the institutional and regulatory framework

The conference participants pointed out that strengthening the institutional and regulatory framework is crucial for a systematic and long-term response to the problem of disinformation. Institutions should have clearly defined responsibilities, cooperation mechanisms, and tools to monitor and respond to disinformation campaigns. To achieve this, it is necessary to:

- **Develop clear national strategies to tackle disinformation,** which include coordination between ministries, regulators, media councils, and the education sector. The strategy must have measurable goals and timeframes.
- **Strengthen the role of media regulators**, in particular in the areas of ownership transparency, labelling of sponsored and political content, and oversight of digital platforms.
- **Introduce an obligation of transparency about algorithms** (to the extent possible) for large online platforms, in particular when it comes to recommending content that may have a social impact.
- **Ensure legal protection of the freedom of expression,** while clearly distinguishing disinformation from legitimate opinion or satire, to make sure that the measures are not used for censorship.
- **Establish crisis protocols** for rapid institutional response in situations of massive spread of disinformation (e.g. during elections, crisis situations or public health challenges).
- **Encourage international cooperation**, especially within the EU and regional initiatives, to share data, good practices, and jointly respond to cross-border disinformation campaigns.
- **Implement consistently the Digital Services Act (DSA),** which means there should be stricter checks on risky algorithmic systems and greater transparency of advertising, as well as an obligation for platforms to assess and reduce the systemic risk of disinformation.
- **Standardize the methodology for detecting and monitoring disinformation through the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO),** serving as a hub for a cross-border and multidisciplinary community of independent fact-checkers, academic researchers, and other relevant stakeholders for collaboration.
- **Establish national centers to combat information and communication threats,** coordinated with EDMO.

A strong institutional framework should not be based solely on sanctions, but on prevention, transparency, and cooperation. Regulation must keep pace with technological developments, but also maintain public trust through clarity.

2. Emphasizing the role of education

Citizens and experts highlighted that education is one of the most efficient long-term tools in strengthening the society's resilience to disinformation. Strongly encouraging the media literacy initiative is one of the important actions of the European Union (EU), empowering citizens to critically evaluate information online. There is the possibility of using resources such as the European Commission's guidelines for teaching on disinformation. It is important to use the provided and available methodologies and tools in order to achieve a global development of media literacy, and to enable citizens to assess information on their own. The most important steps are to:

- **Introduce media and information literacy topics into formal curricula,** at all levels of education, as cross-curricular content or separate teaching units.
- **Train teachers and professors**, through continuous education so that they can teach the recognition of disinformation, sources of information, and digital manipulation.
- **Encourage problem-based and exploratory learning**, in which students analyze real-life examples of disinformation, compare sources, and engage in reasoned discussions.
- **Develop digital competencies**, including an understanding of algorithms, social networks, and the attention economy, so that students understand why certain content is spread.
- **Encourage cooperation between schools, the media and the civil sector**, through workshops, guest lectures, and joint projects.

Education should not be a one-off intervention, but rather a continuous process that keeps pace with technological and social change. Systematic investment in education builds generations that are more resilient, independent, and responsible in the information space.

3. Encouraging media literacy of the youngest

The participants agreed that children and younger students are coming into contact with digital content at an increasingly early age, which is why it is necessary to start developing media literacy from the youngest age, in a manner that is age-appropriate and pedagogically safe. The recommendations are to:

- **Introduce media literacy in early childhood and preschool education,** through games, stories, and simple activities that encourage distinguishing between real and fictional content.
- **Develop customized educational materials**, visual and interactive, which explain the basic concepts such as news, ads, sources, and intent of the message.
- **Involve parents and guardians**, through educational workshops and guides, so that they can support children in using media safely at home.

- **Encourage the development of emotional literacy**, as disinformation often targets emotions such as fear or excitement, which is especially important in children.
- **Teach children to ask questions,** for example: who did this, why, can I check elsewhere?

The goal is not to burden children with complex concepts, but to develop the foundations of a critical attitude towards information. Habits adopted early become the basis of responsible behavior in later digital life.

4. Highlighting the objectivity of fact-checkers

During the discussions, it was recognized that fact-checkers play a truly key role in the fight against disinformation, but their effectiveness depends on public trust in their objectivity and independence. Therefore, it is necessary to:

- **Provide clear and publicly available work methodologies,** to explain how facts are checked, which sources are used, and how conclusions are ultimately drawn.
- **Emphasize independence from political and economic interests**, including transparent funding of fact-checking organizations.
- **Apply the same criteria to all actors,** regardless of political or ideological affiliation.
- **Openly correct one's own mistakes,** because transparency in mistakes strengthens credibility.
- **Communicate the results clearly and accessibly,** which means the results should be explained in a clear and understandable way, without underestimating the audience or imposing views.

Objectivity is a communication responsibility, and trust is built through consistency, openness, and professional standards.

5. Recognizing and countering disinformation

It was concluded that countering disinformation effectively requires a combination of technological, educational, and social measures that act preventively and reactively. The measures are as follows:

- **Develop tools for early detection of disinformation,** including analysis of trends, narratives, publication dates, and sources of dissemination.
- **Encourage citizens to take an active role** by reporting suspicious content and participating in education.
- **Employ "prebunking" strategies,** and warn of typical patterns of disinformation in advance before it spreads.
- **Strengthen cooperation between platforms, media, and institutions**, to reduce the spread of harmful content without compromising freedom of expression.
- **Develop resilience, not just reaction,** focusing on strengthening critical thinking in the long term.

- **Improve measures continuously,** and constantly monitor the effect of measures, to be able to react and improve.

Countering disinformation is not a one-off effort, but a continuous social process that requires the engagement at all levels, from the individual to the institutional.

6. Education on EU policies

Participants agreed that a clear understanding of the EU's actual policies and activities can help to identify various unsubstantiated claims and manipulations that are directed against democratic processes, such as elections. Some ways are to:

- **Get involved in EU initiatives,** as there are various EU-funded projects and calls that citizens can get involved in, which are aimed at fighting disinformation and strengthening media literacy. One such project is DECIDE.
- **Include education on EU policies in formal and non-formal education,** with a special emphasis on media literacy and lifelong learning.
- **Encourage the use of official sources of information,** such as the websites of the European Commission or the European Parliament, and educate citizens on how to check the information and documents available on these platforms.
- **Develop the ability to critically analyze content about the EU in the media and on social networks,** including distinguishing facts from opinions, comments, and propaganda messages.
- **Focus educational activities on debunking common disinformation narratives**, such as those that question the democratic legitimacy of the EU or misrepresent electoral processes.
- **Encourage cooperation between educational institutions, the media, and civil society**, in order to ensure quality, accessible, and socially relevant educational content.

Education on EU policies must not be seen as publicity, but as a tool to empower citizens. Informed citizens are more likely to recognize manipulations, make decisions based on facts, and actively participate in democratic processes. This strengthens trust in institutions and society's resilience to disinformation in the long term.

7. Strengthening cross-sectoral cooperation and community involvement

It was underlined that an effective fight against disinformation requires coordinated action by different actors, institutions, the education system, the media, fact-checkers, civil society, and the citizens themselves. Isolated measures have a limited impact, while cross-sectoral cooperation allows for a comprehensive and sustainable approach to strengthening resilience to disinformation. In order to do this, it is necessary to:

- **Establish formal mechanisms of cooperation** between state institutions, regulatory bodies, the media, educational institutions, and civil society organizations dealing with media literacy and fact-checking.

- **Encourage the exchange of information and good practices,** including joint knowledge bases, regular meetings, and coordinated responses in case of disinformation spreading.
- **Involve local communities,** libraries, schools, and cultural centers as places of education and public dialogue on disinformation and reliable sources of information.
- **Strengthen the role of civil society**, which often has direct contact with citizens and can adapt educational content to the specific needs of different groups.
- **Encourage cooperation with digital platforms,** while respecting freedom of expression, in order to quickly identify and limit the dissemination of harmful content.
- **Involve citizens as active participants** through campaigns, workshops, and tools for reporting suspicious content.
- **Ensure transparency of cooperation** to avoid the perception of political bias or non-transparent action.

Strengthening cross-sectoral cooperation creates a cohesive resilience system, where disinformation is tackled not only by reacting, but by collective preventive action of the whole of society.



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Conclusion

Resilience to disinformation is key to maintaining citizens' trust in institutions, the media, and democratic processes. The modern information space, marked by a rapid spread of content and complex political narratives, requires a comprehensive approach that combines regulation, education, and social cooperation. Strengthening the institutional and regulatory framework allows for coordinated action and timely response, while education and media literacy strengthen citizens' ability to recognize inaccurate or manipulative information. It is especially important to include the youngest, because early education creates the foundations for critical thinking and responsible use of the media. First and foremost, it is crucial to have objective information verification tools, in order to develop critical thinking and the very skill of countering the spread of disinformation. The European Union has a key role to play in this topic, as it can and should invest in projects to protect the objectivity of fact-checkers. Fact-checkers and education on EU policies further increase resilience of the society. Transparent and accessible communication of results, and a clear understanding of the EU's actual policies and competences, helps citizens to distinguish between verified information and unsubstantiated claims. Establishing cross-sectoral cooperation between institutions, education, the media, civil society, and citizens creates a cohesive system of resilience. Such an approach allows for early detection of disinformation, its effective countering, and the promotion of informed participation in democratic life.

Finally, a project-based approach that combines regulation, education, fact-checking, and cooperation of social actors contributes to the creation of a resilient, informed, and democratically accountable society.

These recommendations represent the voice of the conference participants and of the citizens involved in the DECIDE project, who articulated their vision of a more resilient, transparent, and democratic European information space through dialogue, exchange of experiences, and joint reflection.

The document is not just an analysis of the challenges, but **a concrete contribution of citizens to the European debate on future policies**, with the aim of strengthening trust, freedom of expression, and informed participation in democratic processes.

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