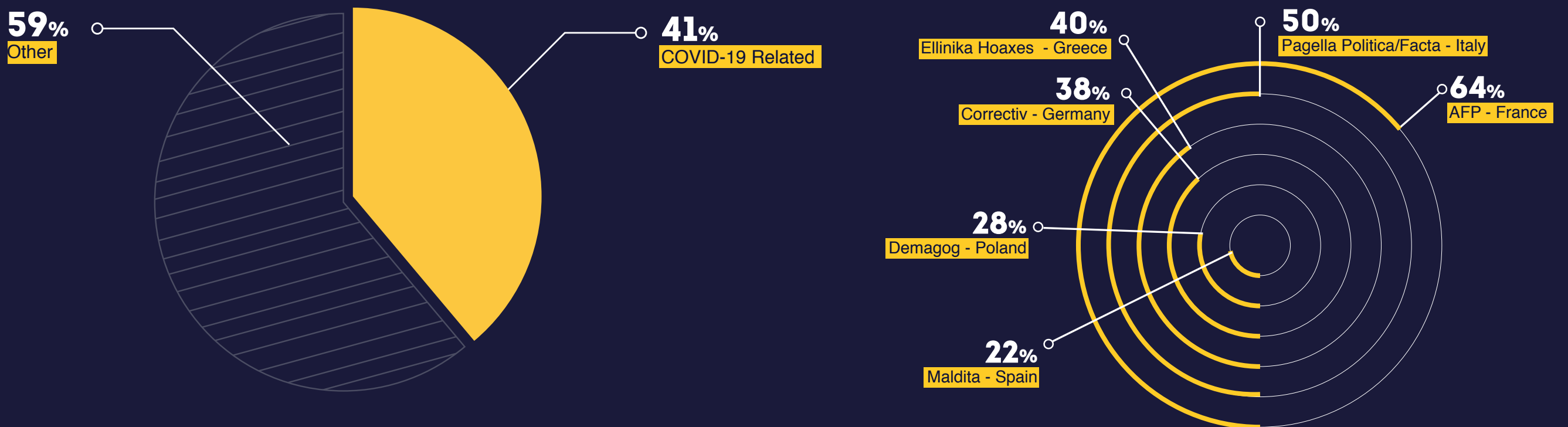




European Digital Media Observatory

# **COVID-19 DISINFORMATION'S ARSENAL IS WELL SPREAD ACROSS THE EU, AND DISINFORMATION ABOUT AFGHANISTAN IS ON THE RISE**

Monthly brief no. 3 – EDMO fact-checking network



## MORE THEN 40% OF THE ITEMS VERIFIED IN AUGUST WAS COVID-19 RELATED

The 11 organizations\* that are part of the EDMO's fact-checking network and contributed to this brief published a total of 1,152 fact-checking articles in August 2021. Out of these articles 473 (41%) concerned COVID-19 related disinformation.

Significant variations exist among those organizations. For example, out of the total verifications, Maldita (Spain) reported that 22% were COVID-19 related, a number that rises to 28% for Demagog (Poland), to 38% for Correctiv (Germany), to 40% for Ellinika Hoaxes (Greece), to 50 % for PagellaPolitica/Facta (Italy) and to 64% for AFP (France).

*\* Organizations that contributed to this brief: AFP, Correctiv, Delfi, Demagog (PI), Dpa, Ellinika Hoaxes, Knack Magazine, Les Surligneurs, Maldita, PagellaPolitica/Facta, The Journal Fact-Check*



## **IN AUGUST, COVID-19 DISINFORMATION TARGETED VACCINES, PCR TESTS, MASKS AND PROTESTS**

In August, the 11 organizations that are part of the EDMO's fact-checking network and contributed to this brief detected similar narratives about the pandemic in different countries, with the common intention of undermining or condemning, through the spread of false news, the efforts made in the different States to promote immunization campaigns.

According to these narratives:

- COVID-19 vaccines are not effective nor safe: e.g., they contain poisonous graphene oxide or they hurt and kill little children. In general, they kill more people than the virus itself, they are responsible for the variants and they caused a new wave of cases
- Pcr tests are also not safe and different States/health organizations took the decision to recall them
- Face masks are dangerous too (e.g., they can cause autism in children)
- Protests against "corona pass" and similars are much bigger than what the mainstream media shows
- Former anti-vaxxers infected with COVID-19 urging people to vaccinate are paid actors
- Not vaccinated people are being denied entry into supermarkets across Europe or their children can be taken from them"
- There are miraculous medicines against COVID-19, in particular
- Ivermectin, but those remedies are kept secret by mainstream media and Big Pharma

## **DISINFORMATION ABOUT AFGHANISTAN IS ALSO SPREADING THE SAME FALSE CONTENT ACROSS MANY EU COUNTRIES**

In August, the 11 organizations that are part of the EDMO's fact-checking network and contributed to this brief also witnessed a significant surge in the disinformation about Afghanistan, during and after the US withdrawal from the country.

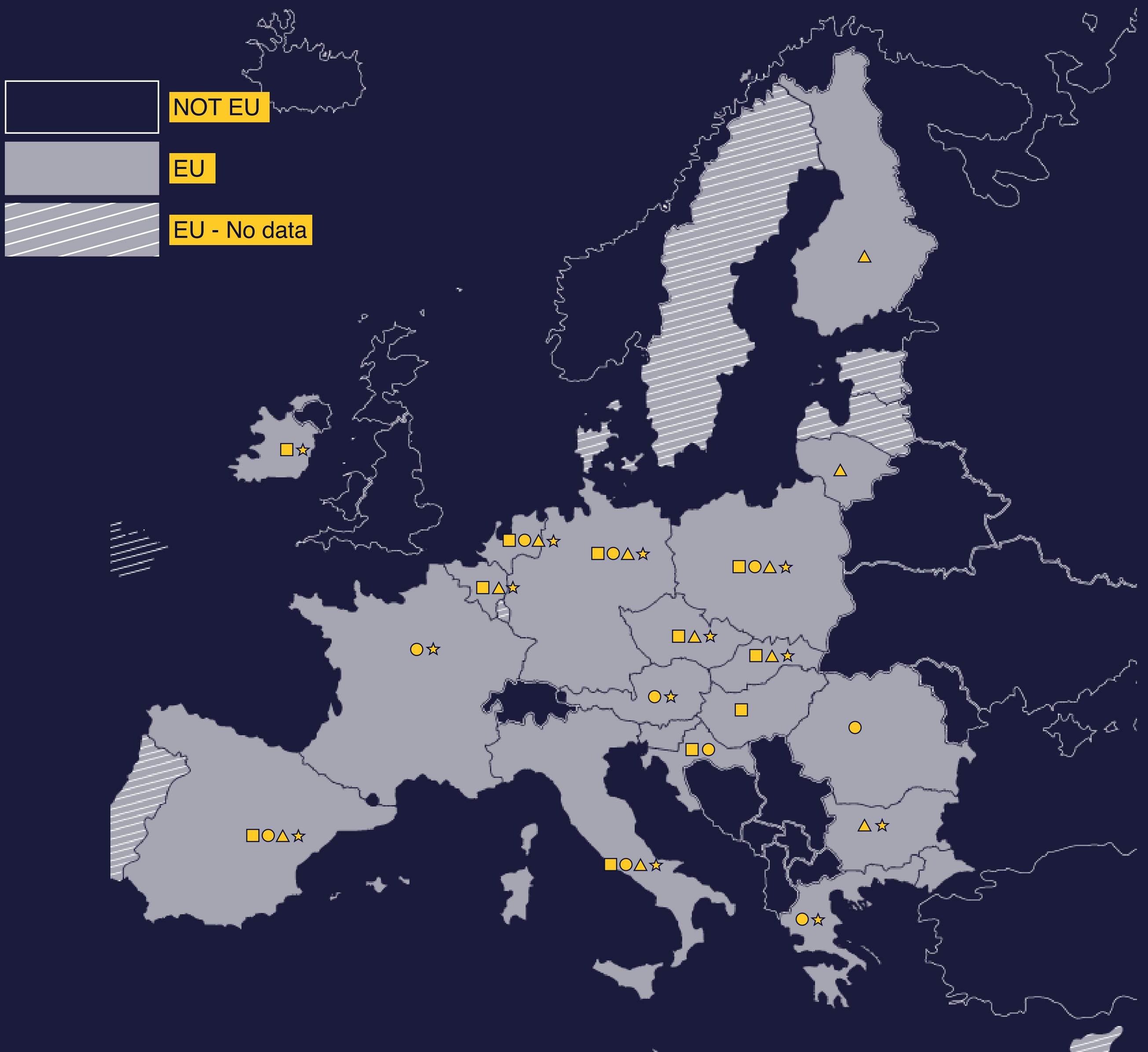
Analyzing the materials gathered through the EDMO fact-checking network we found that:

- The vast majority of false or misleading content does not have a specific target and appears to be mainly attention-grabbing click-baiting (e.g. videos of violence against women, recorded in Syria in 2015 but now reframed as if shot in Afghanistan)
- A small but significant quantity of false or misleading content targets Western politicians or governments (e.g. accusation to German government to have flown almost empty airplanes during the evacuation)
- A small but significant number of false or misleading articles targets migrants

About migrants, in particular, the main message spread through false content (photos, videos and articles) is that the migrants are all male adults, “cowards” leaving behind “their women”, and “not real refugees”.


## THE FOUR FALSE STORIES WITH THE WIDEST CIRCULATION IN THE EU IN AUGUST, BASED ON THE REPORTS BY THE EU FACT CHECKERS, WERE:

- Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine contains high quantities of a chemical known as graphene oxide
- The migrants from Afghanistan are all male adults, without women and children
- ▲ Data from Israel demonstrate that the vaccines are not effective against the COVID-19
- ★ Scientific studies demonstrate that Ivermectin is an effective medicine against COVID-19




## THE MOST SIGNIFICANT VERIFIED DISINFORMATION STORIES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL:




 **IRELAND:**  
claims that  
(mostly young)  
people have died  
after receiving a  
COVID-19 vaccine  
and accusations  
to their families of  
being “murderers”



 **GERMANY:**  
claims that 600 dead  
children were washed  
ashore during the  
floods in the German  
municipality of Bad  
Neuenahr-Ahrweiler last  
month



 **BELGIUM:**  
claims that  
asymptomatic  
individuals would only  
spread a low dose  
of coronavirus, and  
therefore would not  
cause severe illness

## **METHODOLOGY**

The information contained in this brief was collected via a questionnaire sent to the fact-checking organizations that are part of the EDMO fact-checking network

Reference period: 1-31 August 2021. Number of respondents: 11.

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