

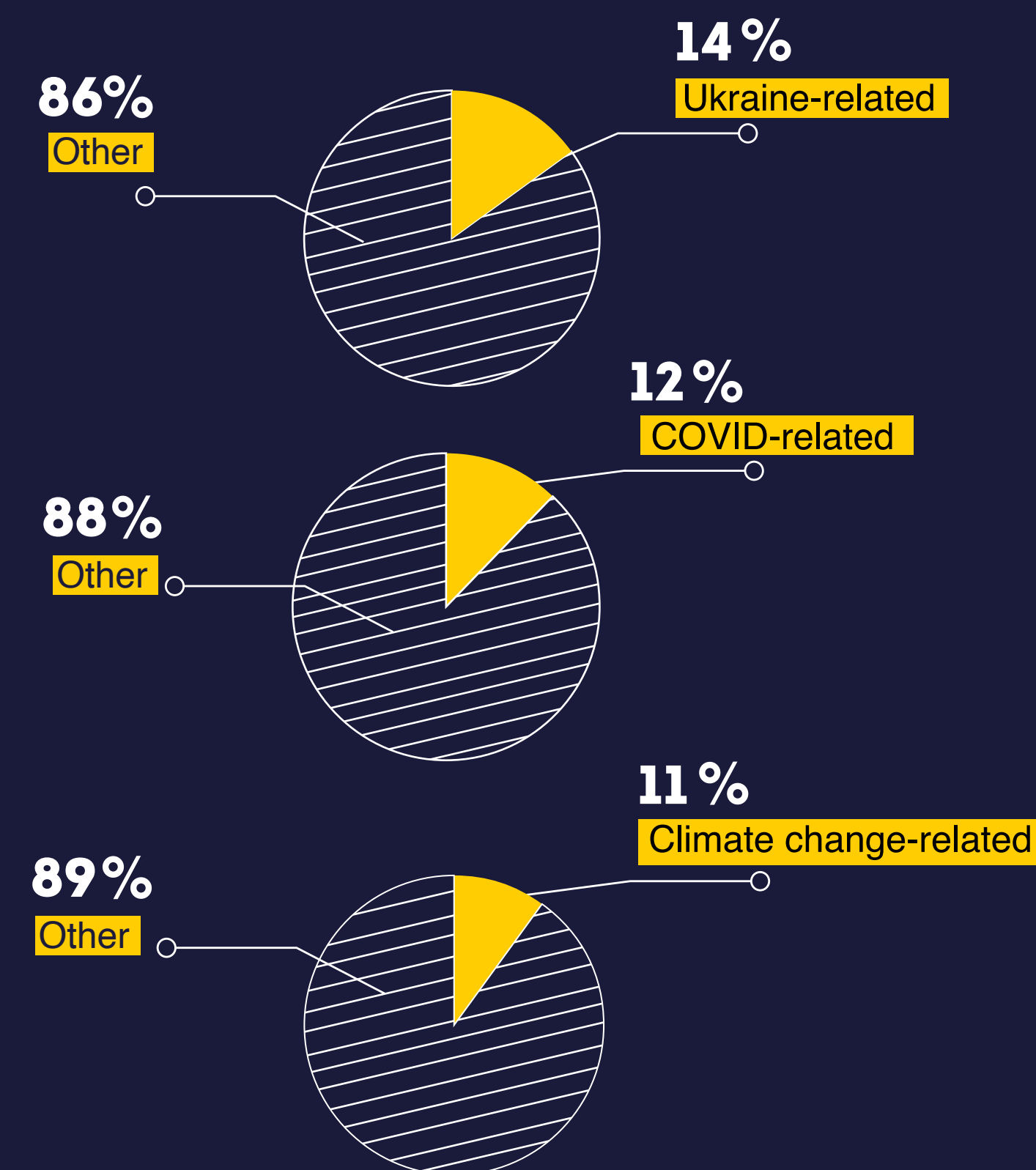


European Digital Media Observatory

MUSLIM MIGRANTS AND UKRAINIAN REFUGEES IN THE DISINFORMATION'S GUNSIGHT

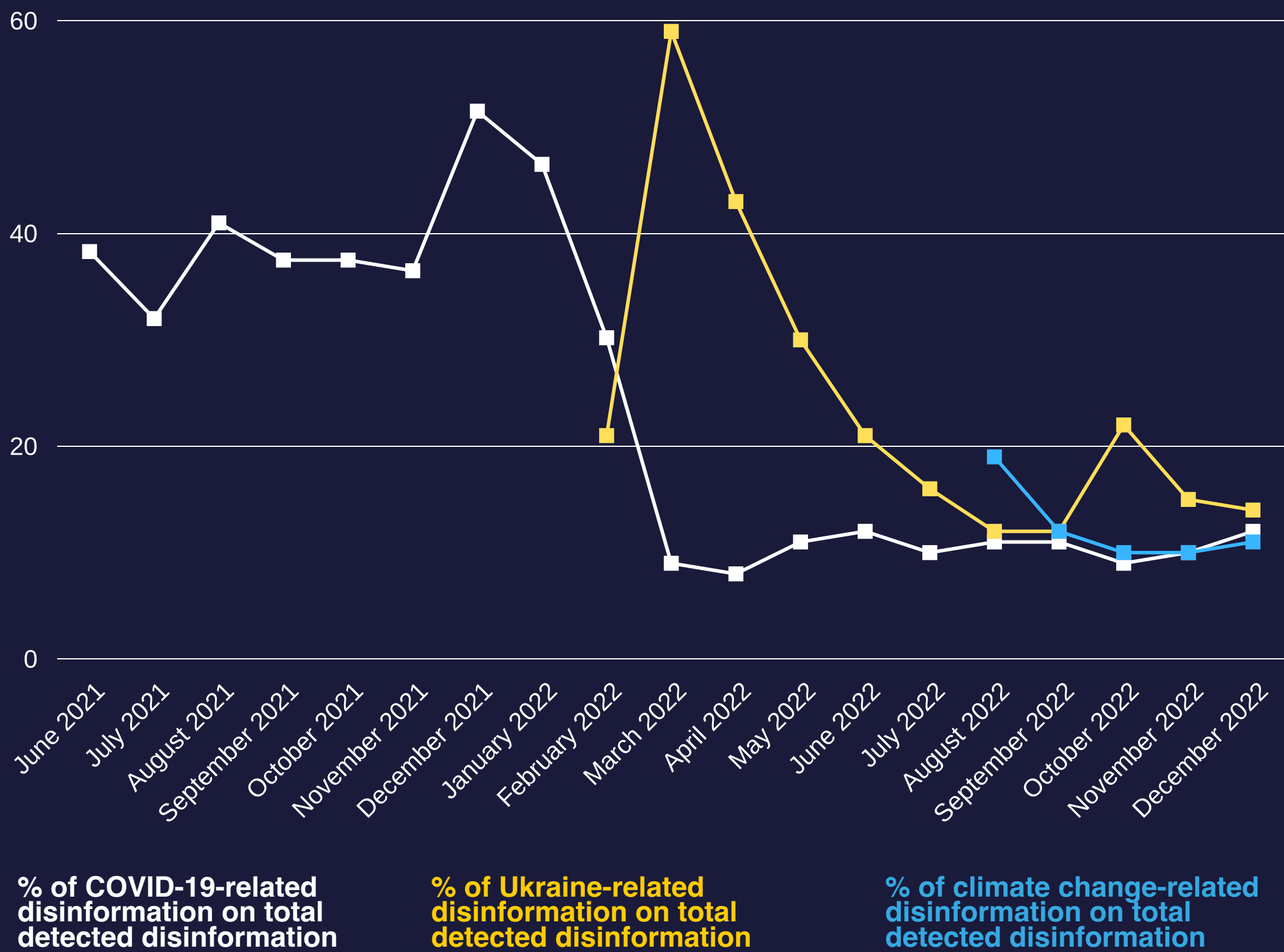
Monthly brief no. 19 – EDMO fact-checking network

DETECTED DISINFORMATION’S MAIN TRENDS REMAIN STABLE IN DECEMBER IN THE EU



The 26 organizations* part of the EDMO fact-checking network that contributed to this brief published a total of 1.251 fact-checking articles in December 2022.

Out of these articles, 178 (14%) focused on Ukraine-related disinformation; 154 (12%) focused on COVID-19-related disinformation; and 132 (11%) focused on climate change-related disinformation. Percentages similar to the ones recorded in the last few months.



* Organizations that contributed to this brief: 15min, AFP, Correctiv, Delfi, Demagog (Pl), DPA, DW, Eesti Päevaleht, EFE Verifica, Factcheck Vlaanderen, Faktabaari, Faktisk, Lakmusz, Les Surligneurs, Maldita, Newtral, Nieuwscheckers, PagellaPolitica/Facta, Poligrafo, PressHUB Romania, Re:Baltica, Science Feedback, The Journal Fact-Check, TjekDet, Verificat, VRTNWS

THE MAJORITY OF THE DETECTED DISINFORMATION ABOUT UKRAINE WAS ABOUT UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

The detected narratives are consistent with the ones already emerging in the previous months: Ukrainian refugees are violent, fascist and/or parasites, and the EU countries treat them better than their own citizens. Some examples:



In Germany several Tiktok-videos claim that money from German taxpayers will be used to renovate two hotels in Mallorca so that refugees from Ukraine could be accommodated there, and a Facebook post claimed that retirement age for Ukrainians in Germany is only 57.



In Ireland a video featured numerous false claims about Ukrainian refugees (e.g. males cannot be refugees, they are deserters, etc.).



In Poland an old video showing people crossing the Polish-Ukrainian border was shared on social media to suggest an ongoing wave of arrivals, and its description alluded to the conspiracy theory of a secret plot by the authorities to ‘resettle’ Ukrainians in Poland.



In Hungary two videos sharing various unfounded claims about Ukrainian ‘fake refugees’ abusing the hospitality of the Hungarian state went viral.

The other main narratives detected about Ukraine are: Nazi sympathies of the Ukrainian population and/or leadership; Russophobia raging in Europe; Zelensky being corrupt or pro-Nazi. This last one gained traction particularly after Zelensky’s visit to the United States.



DISINFORMATION ABOUT MIGRANTS AND FOREIGNERS, ESPECIALLY MUSLIMS, WENT VIRAL FROM SPAIN TO THE REST OF EUROPE

Many false news about migrants and foreigners, especially Muslims, were detected in Spain in December, also in relation to the defeat of the country's national football team against Morocco in the World Championship.

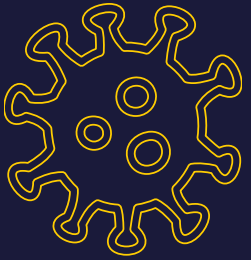
Many false news accused Moroccans fans of having looted stores, destroyed shop windows, set buildings on fire and even killed a Spanish fan. In fact, Moroccan fans did not cause any serious incidents in Spain.

The false news that spilled over from Spain to the rest of the EU is that of a person destroying a Christmas nativity scene with a hammer in Calahorra, a town in northeastern Spain. A false video claims that the person is a Muslim immigrant attacking a Christian symbol: the culprit is actually a Spanish national with mental problems. This false news was detected as the most viral in the EU in December (see slide n. 6).

Since autumn, disinformation about migrants and Muslims seems to be on the rise in Europe.



DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES ABOUT THE PANDEMIC AND CLIMATE CHANGE:



Main narratives conveyed by false news about COVID-19 are generally the same as those detected in the past:

Vaccines are accused to be the cause of a large number of deaths – this narrative was boosted in November and December by “Died Suddenly”, a video spreading conspiracy theories and false news/misleading information about the vaccination, still circulating in many EU countries (e.g. France, Denmark and Netherlands among others);

Vaccines have also been accused of changing the DNA or of being ineffective;

Face masks and lockdowns were targeted by disinformation in December as well, with unproven accusations of being ineffective.



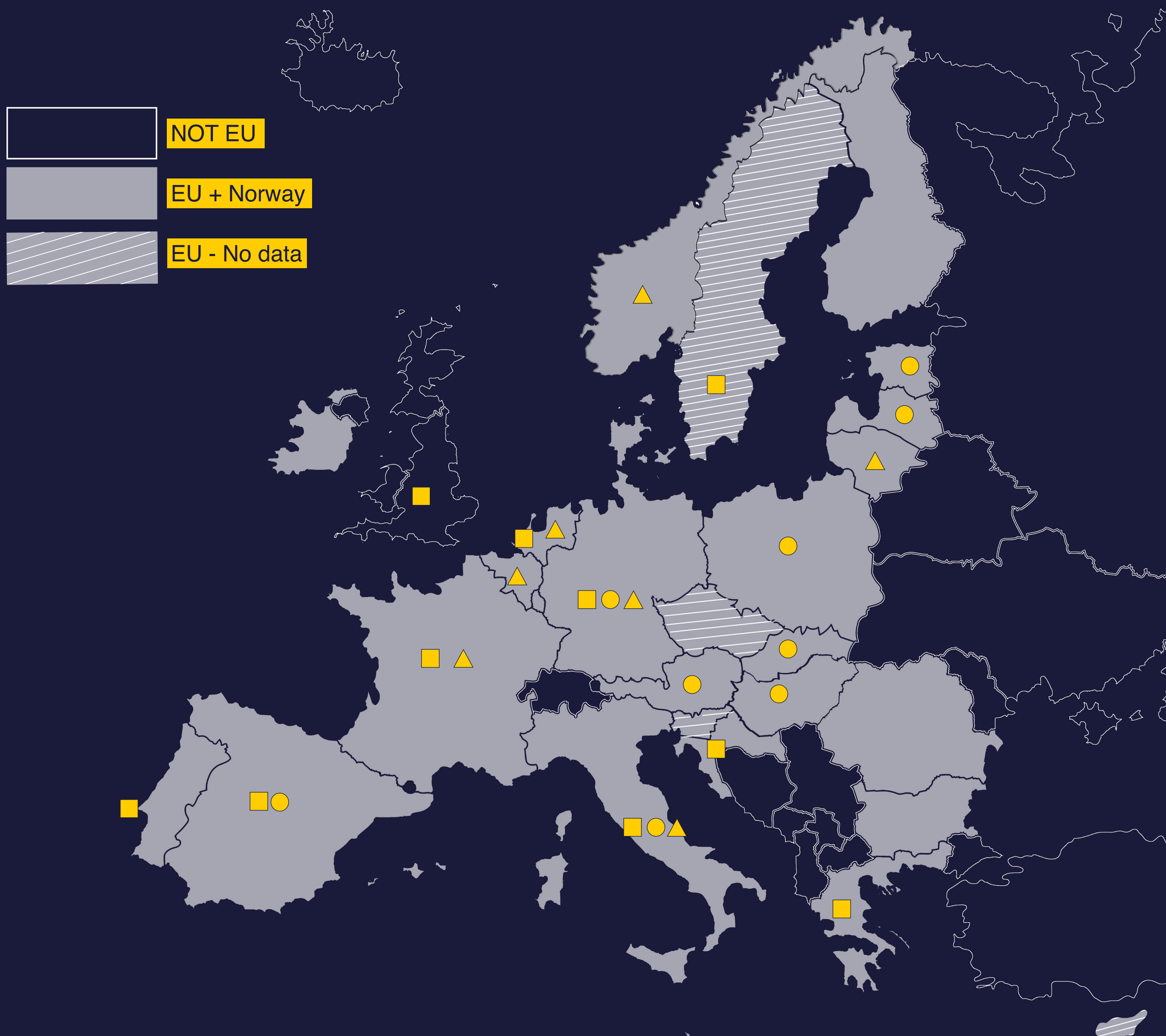
The main narratives conveyed by false news about climate change are also generally the same as those detected in the past few months:

The inexistence of climate change – cold weather recently recorded in many countries was used as evidence of that; if it does exist it is not because of human activity, and/or it is not a real danger anyway;

Electric vehicles are again a target of disinformation, as well as climate activists. A relevant case involving the latter was detected in Germany: a lawyer claimed that drivers blocked by climate activists’ protests can remove the activists with the force, and even if they cause injuries this won’t be a punishable offense because they would be covered by the right of self-defense. Such an incorrect generalization could actually lead to dangerous situations.

THE THREE FALSE STORIES WITH THE WIDEST CIRCULATION IN THE EU IN DECEMBER, BASED ON THE FACT-CHECKERS' REPORTS, WERE:

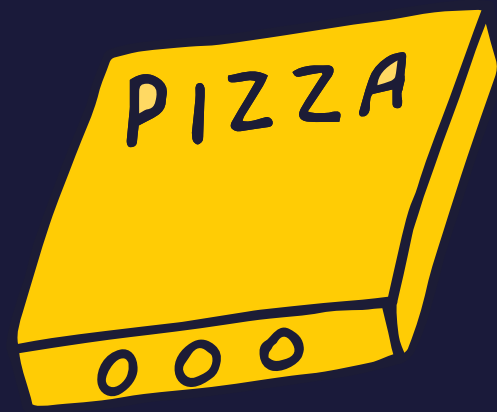
- The video of a person destroying with a hammer a Christmas nativity scene in Calahorra, Spain, captioned as if the author were a Muslim immigrant attacking a Christian symbol.
- A picture portraying Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki visiting a Bandera monument in Kiev.
- ▲ TIME cover portraying Zelensky nominated “person of the year” next to TIME cover from the 1930s portraying Hitler, suggesting they were both nominated for the same reasons.



THE MOST SIGNIFICANT VERIFIED DISINFORMATION STORIES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL:



An article by an Austrian tabloid claims that Ukraine speculated with aid money on the crypto exchange FTX. Since FTX is now bankrupt, the aid money has been “destroyed”.



Claims on social media that Andrew Tate, a controversial British influencer arrested in Romania on December 29 for human trafficking, rape and forming an organised crime group to exploit women, has been “located” thanks to a detail (pizza boxes with Romanian writing on them) in the video he posted on Twitter to insult climate activist Greta Thunberg.



The Olympics board made it mandatory for every country to send teams with at least 10 percent of its members from the LGBTQ+ community.

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

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