



European Digital Media Observatory

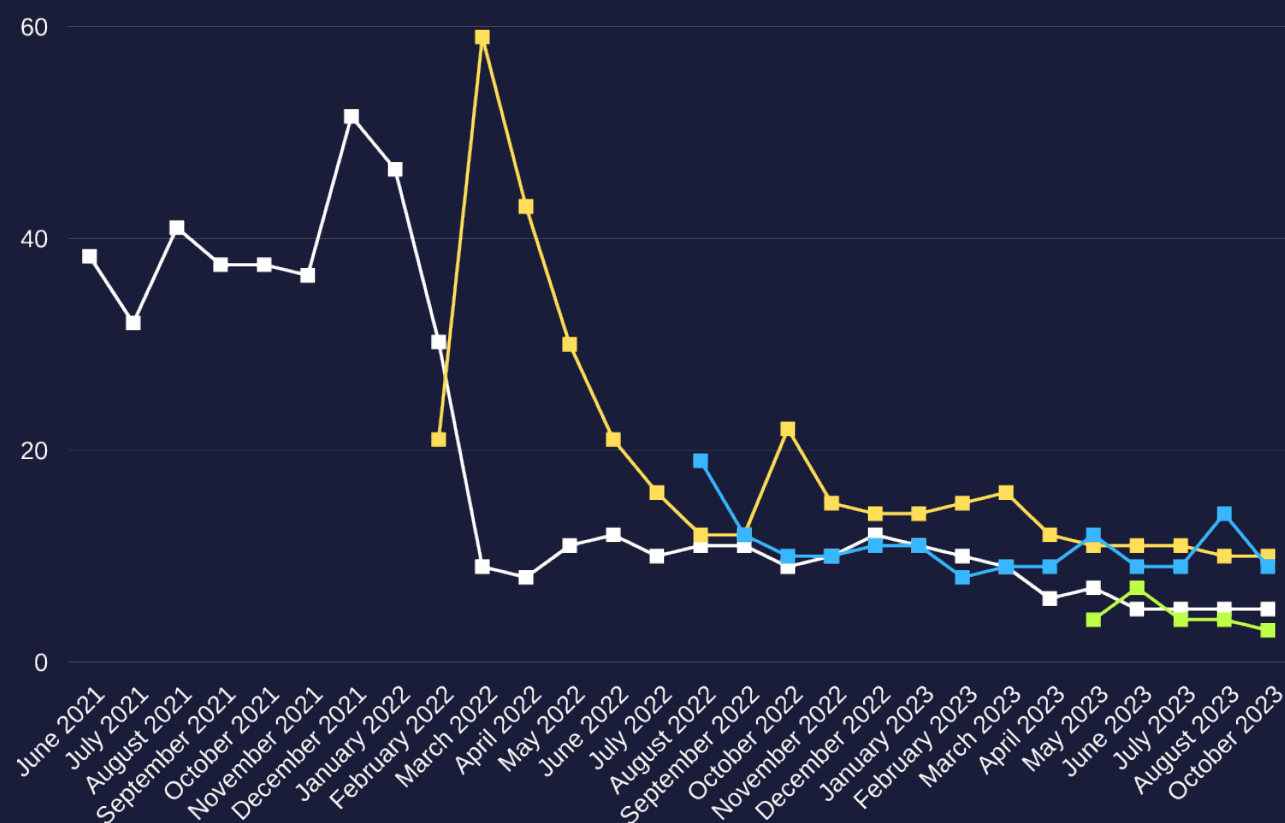
# **DISINFORMATION ABOUT MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES RISES IN SEPTEMBER**

Monthly brief no. 28 – EDMO fact-checking network

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## DISINFORMATION ABOUT UKRAINE AND THE PANDEMIC REMAINS STABLE IN SEPTEMBER, WHILE DISINFORMATION ABOUT CLIMATE AND THE EU DECREASES

The 29 organizations\* part of the EDMO fact-checking network that contributed to this brief published a total of 1.382 fact-checking articles in September 2023.



Out of these articles, 139 (10%) focused on Ukraine-related disinformation; 71 (5%) on COVID-19-related disinformation; 126 (9%) on climate change-related disinformation; and 40 (3%) on disinformation related to the EU.

The percentages of disinformation about the war in Ukraine and the pandemic are the same as in August. After peaking in the previous month, disinformation about climate change has returned to the same level as in July. Disinformation about the EU decreased slightly.

<p><b>% of COVID-19-related disinformation on total detected disinformation</b></p>	<p><b>% of Ukraine-related disinformation on total detected disinformation</b></p>	<p><b>% of climate change-related disinformation on total detected disinformation</b></p>	<p><b>% of EU-related disinformation on total detected disinformation</b></p>
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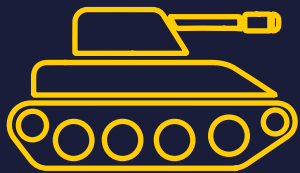
\* Organizations that contributed to this brief: AFP, Correctiv, Delfi, Demagog.cz, Demagog.pl, Demagog.sk, DW, Eesti Päevaleht, EFE Verifica, Ellinika Hoaxes, Eurocomunicare, FactReview, Faktabaari, Faktisk, FranceTV, Funky, Greece Fact Checking, Knack, Lakmusz, Maldita, Newtral, PagellaPolitica/Facta, Polígrafo, Pravda, Publico, Re:Baltica, The Journal Fact-Check, TjekDet, Verificat

## MAIN NARRATIVES



Regarding environmental and climate-related disinformation, as happened in the case of the wildfires in Maui, conspiracy theories have surfaced claiming that natural disasters are caused by humans. Both the devastating earthquake in Morocco and Storm Daniel in Libya were falsely claimed to have been caused by the use of technologies from the HAARP research project, which is falsely claimed to be able to modify the weather. A number of stories about Storm Daniel also exaggerated the already dramatic consequences of the disaster.

Some false stories have focused on portraying climate change measures as oppressive impositions and overrepresenting citizens' alleged reactions to them. False stories about climate denialism and those fabricating pretexts to accuse climate activists of hypocrisy also circulated.



The main disinformation narrative about the war in Ukraine has portrayed Ukrainian leaders and refugees as profiteers who are enriching themselves with aid received for the war. Other false narratives in line with this narrative have accused refugees of cowardice and announced non-existent calls to stop the supply of weapons.

## DISINFORMATION ABOUT IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES IS ON THE RISE

As thousands of people and refugees arrived on the Italian island of Lampedusa after crossing the Mediterranean Sea in September, immigration was at the center of the European debate and disinformation narratives.

One of the most widespread false stories concerned Lampedusa itself, with old videos or film footage being used to falsely claim that some migrants had attacked Italian police or even set fire to an entire building. This kind of stories circulated in several countries, particularly Germany, Spain, Austria, Lithuania and Slovakia.

This false story is consistent with others that portray immigrants and refugees as violent and dangerous to European values, a well-known xenophobic false narrative about immigration that sometimes surfaces in political debate in some countries. In September, for example, in Greece - which was also affected by a lot of disinformation on this issue in August - similar false stories were spread by a politician, and in Ireland it was falsely claimed that asylum seekers could vote and thus influence the national elections. In Spain, the conspiracy theory of the “Great Replacement” was spread, using French demographic reports to falsely claim that they prove a political will to replace citizens with immigrants.





**THE FOUR FALSE STORIES WITH THE WIDEST CIRCULATION IN THE EU IN SEPTEMBER, BASED ON THE FACT-CHECKERS' REPORTS, WERE:**

- Picture of Boris Johnson making the nazi salute during a public ceremony in Ukraine
- USA Today reported about a fight between drunks in New York that involved the Ukrainian delegation
- ▲ Picture of former Ukrainian Defense Minister Reznikov drinking champagne on a yacht portrayed as taken after his recent resignation
- ◆ Bill Gates promoted a plan to cut 70 millions acres of trees in order to fight climate change

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



Russian troops in Ukraine destroyed Leopard tank with German crew



A phone call between the leader of the Progressive Slovakia Party and a journalist about rigged elections



In kindergarten, children are no longer allowed to read Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale "The Ugly Duckling" because it is considered racist



## 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: 1-30 September 2023. Number of respondents: 29.  
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