



European Digital Media Observatory

FROM SPAIN TO POLAND, DISINFORMATION ON MIGRANTS OVERFLOWS EUROPE IN JULY

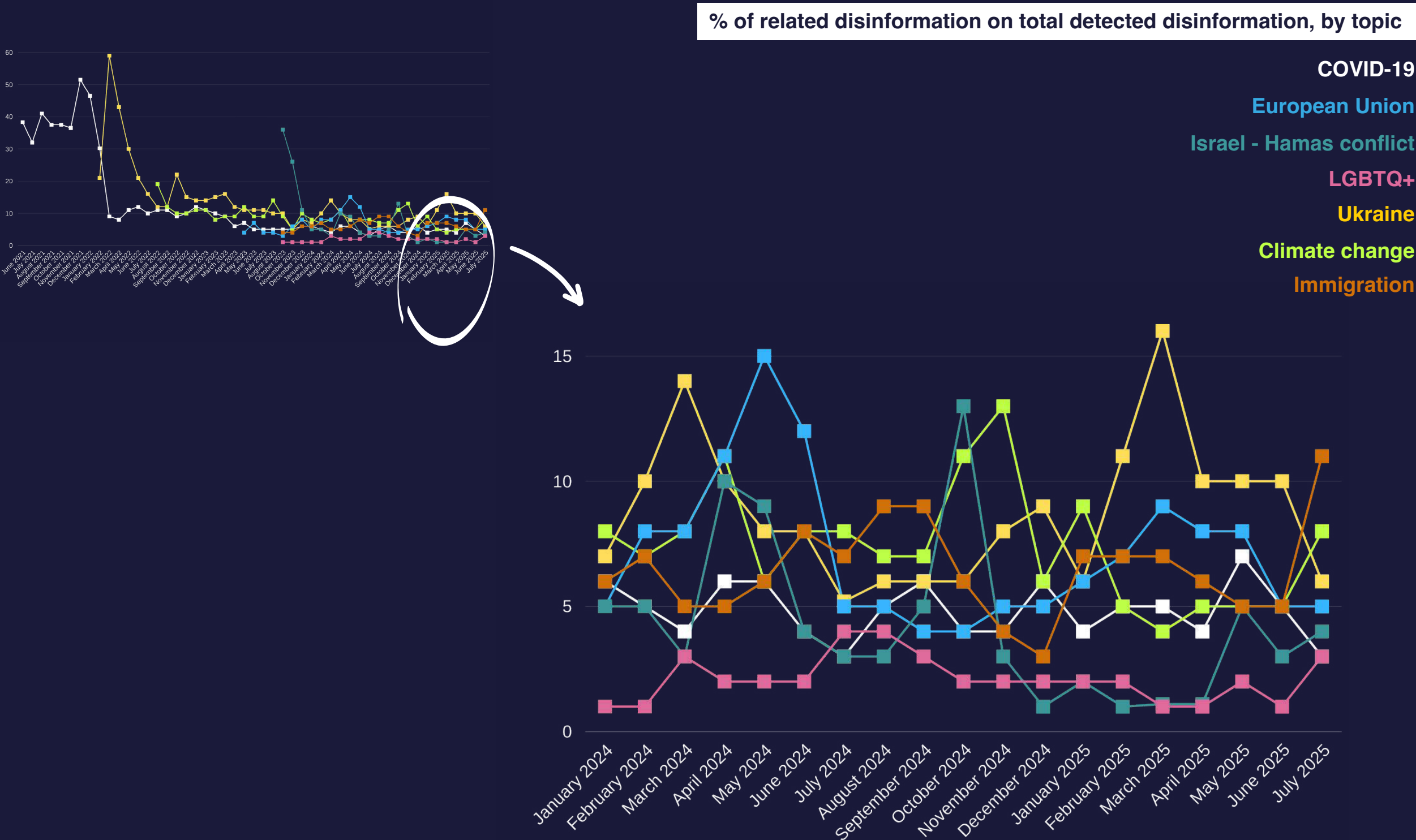
Monthly brief no. 50 – EDMO fact-checking network

IMMIGRATION, CLIMATE CHANGE AND UKRAINE ARE THE MOST TARGETED TOPICS BY DISINFORMATION IN JULY

The 31 organizations* part of the EDMO fact-checking network that contributed to this brief published a total of 1.483 fact-checking articles in July 2025. Out of these articles, 164 (11%) focused on disinformation related to immigration; 119 (8%) on climate change-related disinformation; 84 (6%) on Ukraine-related disinformation; 69 (5%) on disinformation related to the EU; 59 (4%) on the conflict involving Israel and Hamas in Gaza; 50 (3%) on disinformation about LGBTQ+ and gender issues; and 41 (3%) on COVID-19-related disinformation.

The most targeted topic by disinformation in the month of July has been immigration, which increased by five percentage points compared to June. False news related to climate change significantly increased by three percentage points and the topic is on the second step of the podium of most targeted topics in July. Disinformation on the war in Ukraine, in third position, dropped to a significant low registered last summer as well.

False information related to LGBTQ+ and gender issues increased by two percentage points, while the shares of false information about the other topics monitored by these briefs remained stable or showed only minor fluctuations.



* Organizations that contributed to this brief: 15min, AFP, APA-Faktencheck, CORRECTIV, Delfi Lithuania, Delfi Estonia, Demagog.pl, Demagog.cz, Demagog.sk, Deutsche Welle, dpa, EFE Verifica, Ellinika Hoaxes, Facta/Pagella Politica, Factcheck Vlaanderen, Faktisk.no, Funky Citizens, Källkritikbyrån, Knack, Lakmusz, Maldita.es, Newtral, Nieuwscheckers, Oštro, Polígrafo, Pravda Association, Re:Baltica, TjekDet, The Journal FactCheck, VerificaRTVE, Verificat.

NEW AND OLD FACTORS PUSH DISINFORMATION ON IMMIGRATION TO A UNPRECEDENTED RECORD

In July 2025 disinformation on immigration hits a first-time record (since beginning of its monitoring, in October 2023), reaching a percentage of 11%. There are both old and new factors leading to this situation; among the former, the events of Torre Pacheco, Spain, led to a wide circulation of false stories in all Europe (see slide n.6), stirring violence and spreading racism. Similarly, the intensified cooperation on migration policy at the border between Poland and Germany gave disinformers the opportunity to spread false content on immigration border checks and dishonest management of EU frontiers.

Meanwhile, recurrent anti-immigration narratives have also contributed to this wave of disinformation. The conspiracy theory of European Islamisation has been fueled by false stories such as the one according to which the most popular name for newborn boys in County Galway, Ireland, is Muhammad. Similarly, various false news have contributed to the unsubstantiated narrative according to which the State takes care of immigrants more than it does for its own citizens. In Portugal, a false story alleges that immigrants have priority in school enrollment over Portuguese people; similarly, in Poland there is a growing narrative focusing specifically on Ukrainian immigrants, who are believed to be exploiting the Polish unemployment benefit system.



HIGHLIGHTS OF MISINFORMATION IN JULY: CLIMATE CHANGE, FAMINE IN GAZA AND BRIGITTE MACRON



Disinformation related to climate change have widely circulated in July (the third-warmest July since 1850), as was the case of the well-known conspiracy theory on meteorological maps, allegedly portrayed with different colors to spread panic while the temperatures didn't change (see slide n.6). False claims on green energy also circulated, with a video in Germany allegedly proving that such energy harms the environment and a story in Czech Republic claiming that the excessive warming of the planet in recent years is caused by photovoltaic power plants.



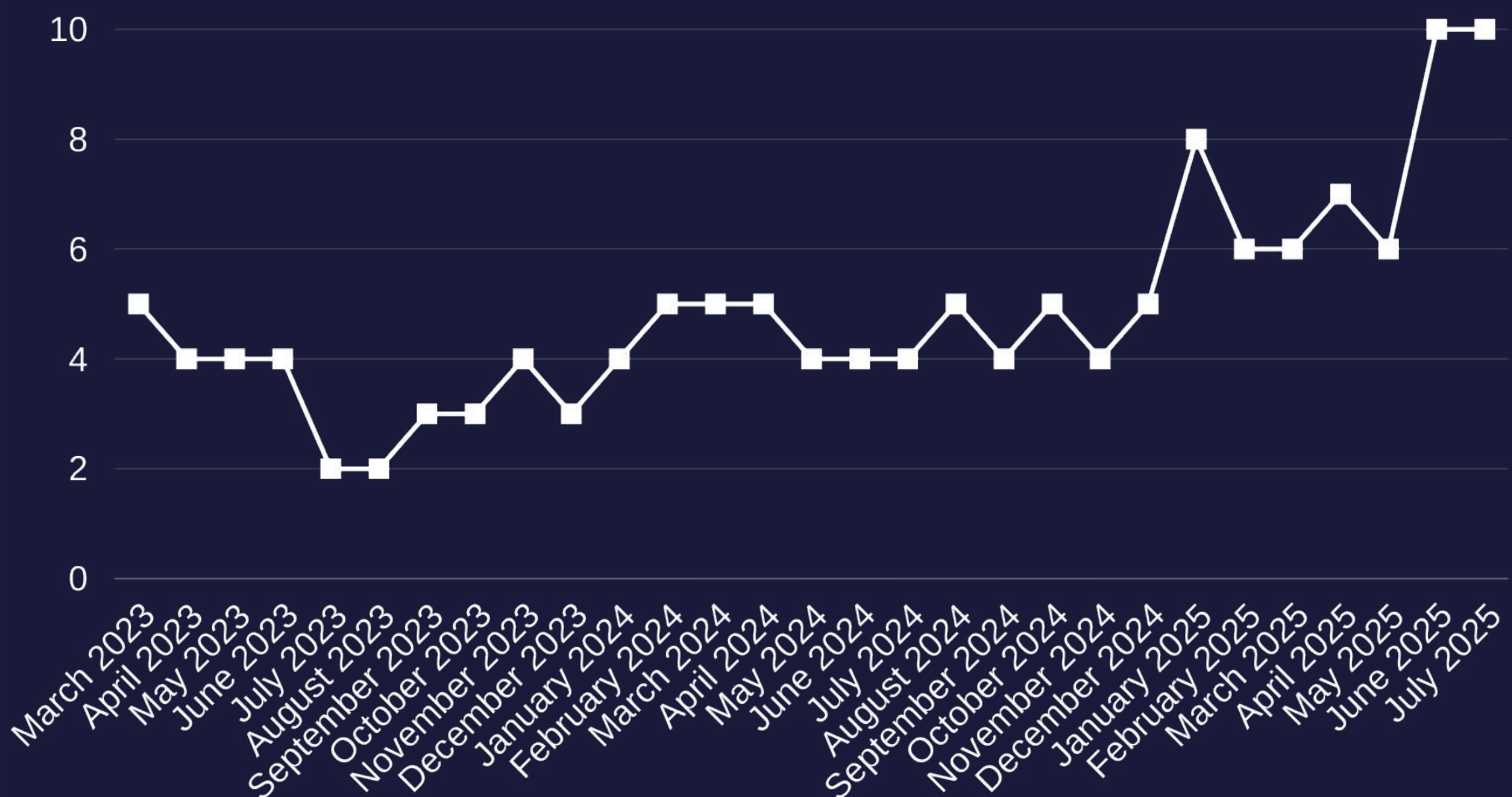
With news and images of the ongoing famine in Gaza, disinformation was used in July (and it's ongoing in August) to spread denialism – in line with the “Pallywood” conspiracy theory, widely used by pro-Israel disinformation – about the sufference of the civilians, framing pictures of children from Gaza as “out of context”, falsely claiming they are from other countries and time. As reconstructed by DW, this denialism spread also because of Grok, X's AI that has been used as a “fact-checker” by various users. In one reported case, the crisis in the Middle East has also been used to fuel anti-semitic conspiracy theories: in Romania, a false claim alleges that 3 million apartments in the country would be prepared “for Jews and Zionists”.



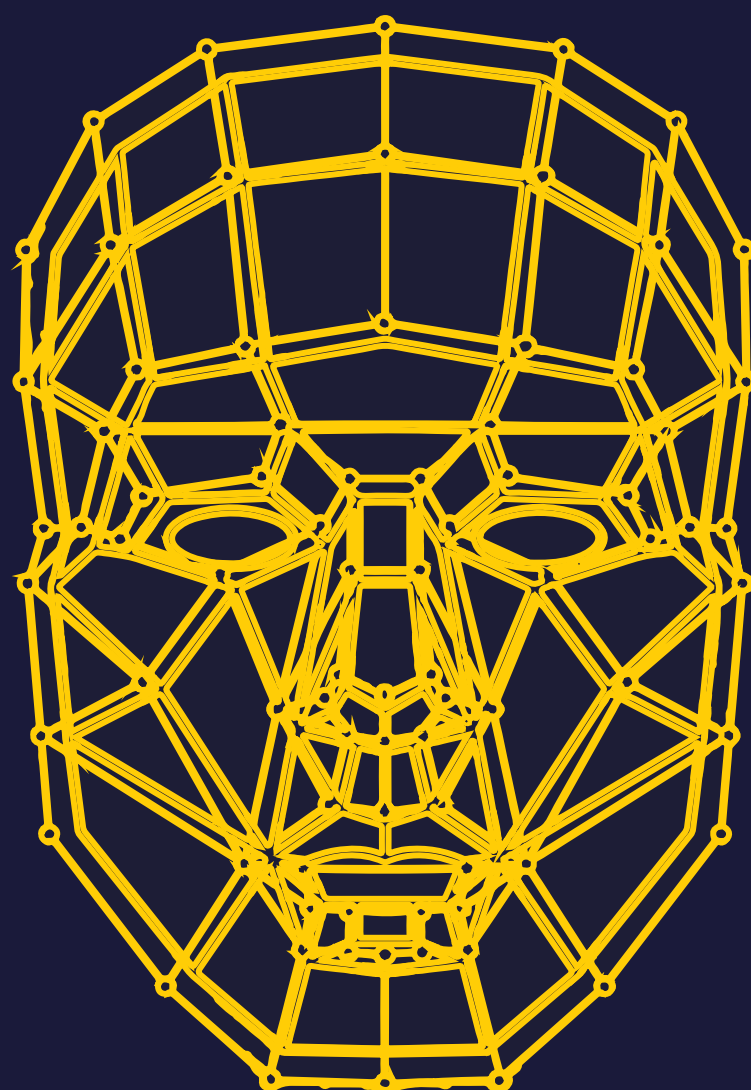
July also saw the comeback of a widely spread transmisogynistic conspiracy theory, according to which the French First Lady Brigitte Macron is actually a man. According to a viral false news (see slide n. 6), the plastic surgeon who would have revealed Brigitte Macron's transition allegedly died in mysterious circumstances.

AI-GENERATED DISINFORMATION REMAINS STABLE

The percentage of disinformation stories using AI-generated content remained stable in July, in line with previous month's record. Out of 1.483 fact-checking articles, 152 addressed the use of this technology in disinformation, representing 10% of the total.

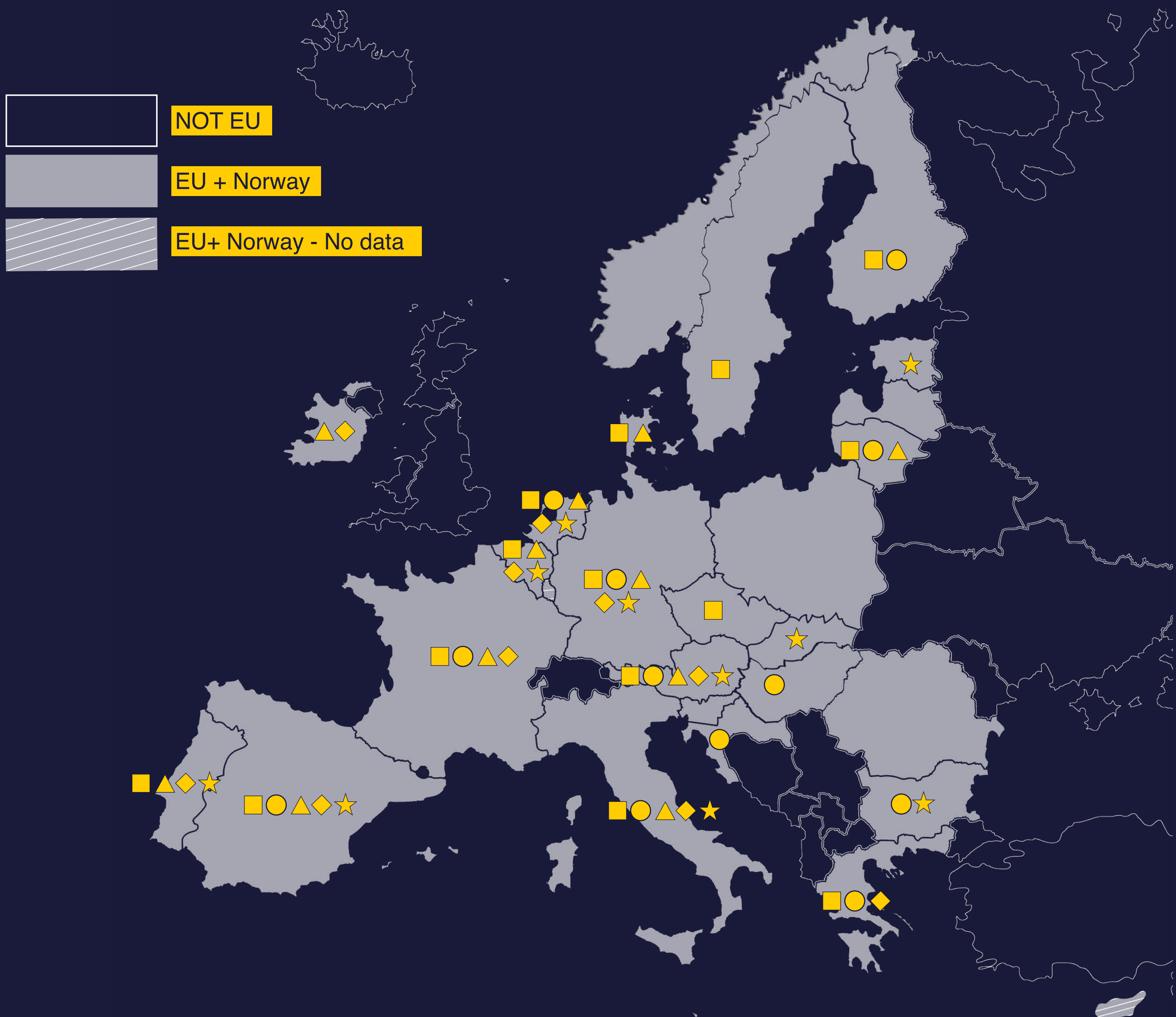


In July, AI-generated false stories revolved around the Epstein files conspiracy theory, with widely circulated fabricated images of US President Donald Trump posing with Jeffrey Epstein and some young girls (see slide n.6). An interesting use of AI was recorded in Bulgaria, with an AI-generated fake news report claiming that Russian President Vladimir Putin is threatening Germany with military strikes. Other widely circulated AI content included fake pictures of a violinist in a Nazi concentration camp, in line with the growing online trend of AI-generated images of alleged Holocaust victims.



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

- Meteorological maps are chromatically manipulated in order to spread panic about climate change (Chromatic change conspiracy theory)
- The surgeon that has operated Brigitte Macron for her transition has died
- ▲ AI-generated images of Donald Trump with Jeffrey Epstein
- ◆ Real images and videos of Palestinian victims of Israel's military actions framed as "false"
- ★ False/misleading images and videos about the beating of a senior citizen by three Moroccan men in Torre Pacheco, Spain



THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISINFORMATION STORIES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL:



Politician Aleš Primc shared a misleading photo claiming a non-existent left-wing referendum campaign suggests children don't need fathers



The elections in Romania were annulled based on the abusive application of the Digital Services Act



According to a new law, refugee accommodation centers would be created in 16,000 settlements across Greece, each with a capacity of 100 people



A graphic claims only 17% of Bürgergeld (citizen's income) recipients are Germans without a migration background



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 July 2025. Number of respondents: 31.
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