



European Digital Media Observatory

TRUMP'S DIPLOMACY AND SUMMER WEATHER CATALYSE DISINFORMATION IN AUGUST

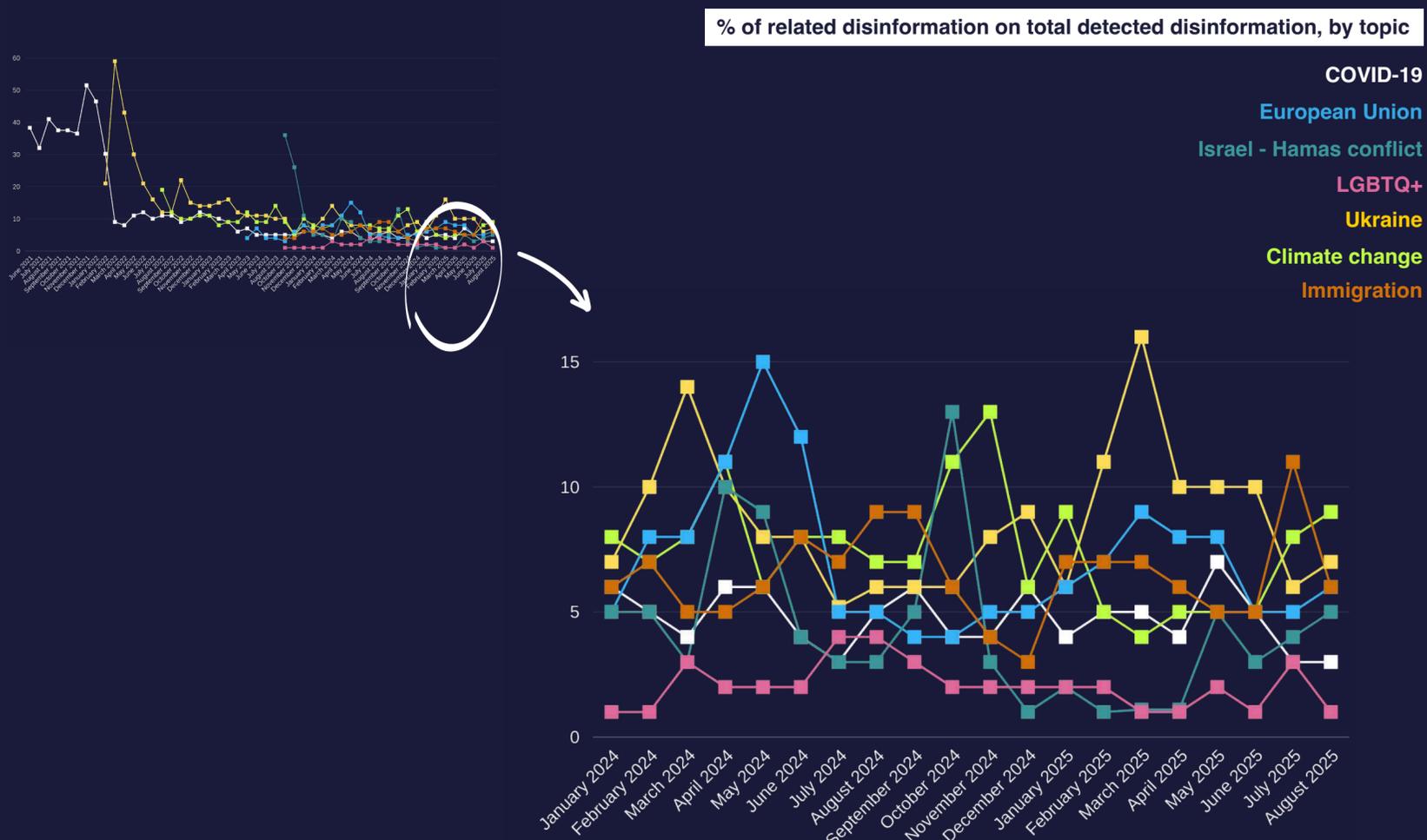
Monthly brief no. 51 – EDMO fact-checking network

CLIMATE CHANGE, UKRAINE AND EUROPEAN UNION ARE THE MOST TARGETED TOPICS BY DISINFORMATION IN AUGUST

The 31 organizations* part of the EDMO fact-checking network that contributed to this brief published a total of 1.441 fact-checking articles in August 2025. Out of these articles, 127 (9%) focused on climate change-related disinformation; 99 (7%) on Ukraine-related disinformation; 90 (6%) on disinformation related to the EU; 90 (6%) on disinformation related to immigration; 79 (5%) on the conflict involving Israel and Hamas in Gaza; 49 (3%) on COVID-19-related disinformation; and 18 (1%) on disinformation about LGBTQ+ and gender issues.

The most targeted topic by disinformation in the month of August has been climate change, in line with the growing trend registered the past month. False news related to the war in Ukraine and to the European Union have also increased, as it happened with disinformation on the crisis in Gaza, with the ongoing narrative – detected in July – that the famine is either not real or widely exaggerated.

While the shares of false stories related to immigration and LGBTQ+ issues have decreased compared to last month, disinformation about the other topics monitored by these briefs remained stable.



* Organizations that contributed to this brief: 15min, AFP, APA, CORRECTIV, Delfi Lithuania, Delfi Estonia, Demagog Poland, Demagog Czech Republic, Demagog Slovakia, Deutsche Welle, dpa, Ellinika Hoaxes, Faktabaari, Faktisk.no, FactReview, Funky Citizens, Greece Fact Check, Källkritikbyrå, Knack, Lakmusz, Maldita.es, Newtral, Oštro, Pagella Politica/Facta, Polígrafo, Pravda Association, Re:Baltica, TjekDet, The Journal FactCheck, VerificaRTVE, Verificat.

DISINFORMATION TARGETING THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE WAR IN UKRAINE INCREASES

The most viral disinformation claim detected in August, according to the data gathered by EDMO, is the AI-generated picture of European leaders waiting in a corridor of the White House for a meeting with Trump (see slide n.7). Trump's diplomacy, in particular the summit with Putin in Alaska and the following meetings with European leaders in August, enhanced the virality of this and other claims aimed at ridiculing and belittling the European Union, or depicting its members as warmongers. Among these, European fact-checkers detected an AI-generated clip of the Romanian PM saying that Romania will officially enter the conflict in Ukraine in a move decided together with NATO and EU allies or a video claiming Moldovan troops are "dying on a foreign front". In general, pro-Russian disinformation has contributed to spreading this image of a militarized and aggressive Europe, with false stories featuring, for example, British military officers captured during a Russian raid in Ukraine.

Although August marked the beginning of tariffs enforcement between the USA and the EU, this topic seems to have been temporarily left out from disinformation narratives. Nonetheless, traditional disinformation narratives about the EU kept circulating, with false news demonising it as a digital dictatorship and a realm of LGBTQ+ indoctrination, or ridiculing its directives.



In line with false narratives surrounding the peace talks and targeting the EU, disinformation on the war in Ukraine exaggerated the rapprochement of the US and Russia, with a false video of American fighter jets in Alaska to honour Russian President Vladimir Putin. As previously mentioned, the distancing between the USA and the EU has been hyperbolised, and various false claims sowing discord between Ukraine and its allies have been spread. Among these, a false story according to which Ukraine is using Estonian airspace, the claim that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky sold the city of Odessa to Italy, and a video of Zelensky commenting on the West's conspiracy against him.

With the aim of undermining European support to Ukraine, the reality within the country has also been misrepresented, with a fake survey showing that more than 80% of Ukrainians want an end to the war even at the cost of territorial concessions, and a claim that 400,000 soldiers have deserted the Ukrainian army.



INCREASING TEMPERATURES, INCREASING CLIMATE DISINFORMATION

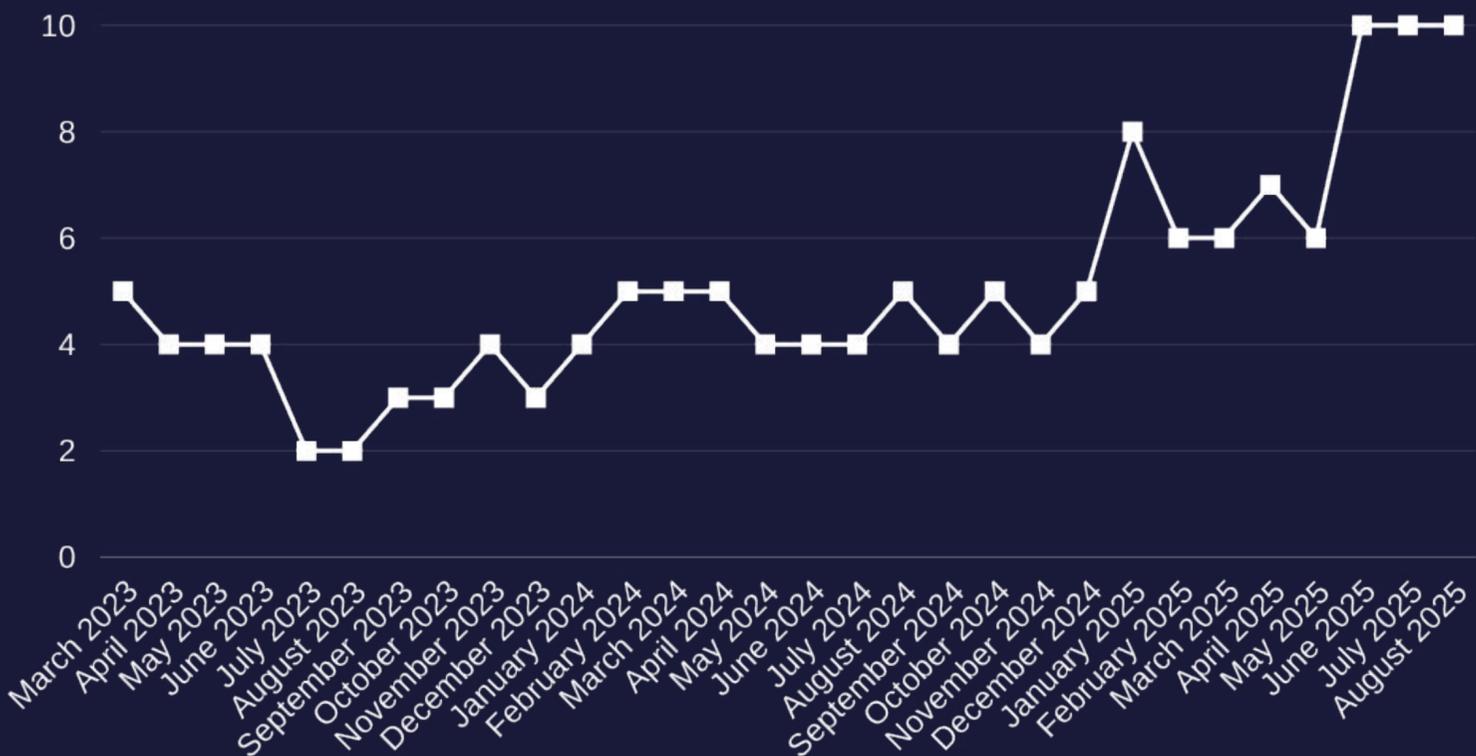
In line with last month's trend, EDMO fact-checkers registered an increase of false stories related to climate change. Interestingly, the political aspect infiltrated false claims related to extreme events, and pro-Russian disinformation took hold of environmental false stories as well: for example, Ukraine is depicted as the culprit of extreme rain registered in Lithuania. In Greece and in Portugal, instead, Russia has been portrayed as a benevolent power, since it allegedly offered to send water bombers and help locals against wildfires.

Cyclical disinformation narratives surrounding wildfires spread in particular throughout the Mediterranean countries, with references to conspiracy theories about laser beams or supposed plans of land rezoning; in Spain, a false story regarding the alleged arson on behalf of a foreign citizen widely circulated (something similar happened in Greece in August 2023, with dire consequences in the real world). Disinformation actors also focused on the alleged absurd measurements taken by governments to tackle climate change: the UK is allegedly planning to introduce CO2 passports by 2040, which will restrict citizens' travel abroad, and the Belgian town of Knokke has been under a climate lockdown.

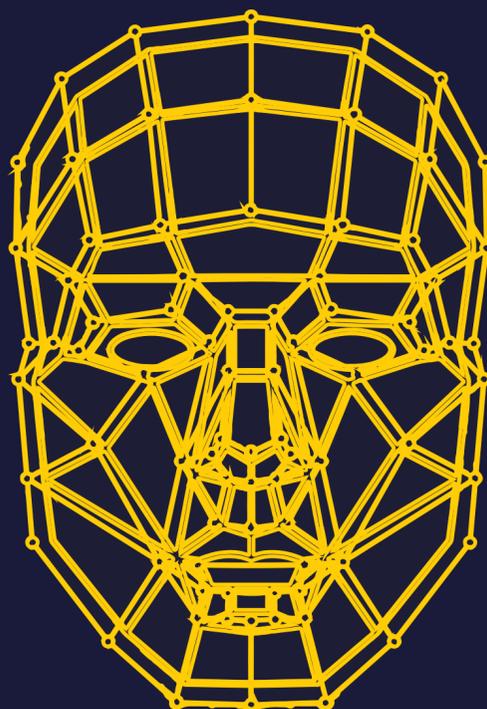


THE LEVEL OF AI-GENERATED DISINFORMATION STAYS HIGH

The percentage of disinformation stories using AI-generated content remained stable in August, along with the previous months' record. Out of 1.441 fact-checking articles, 147 addressed the use of this technology in disinformation, representing 10% of the total.

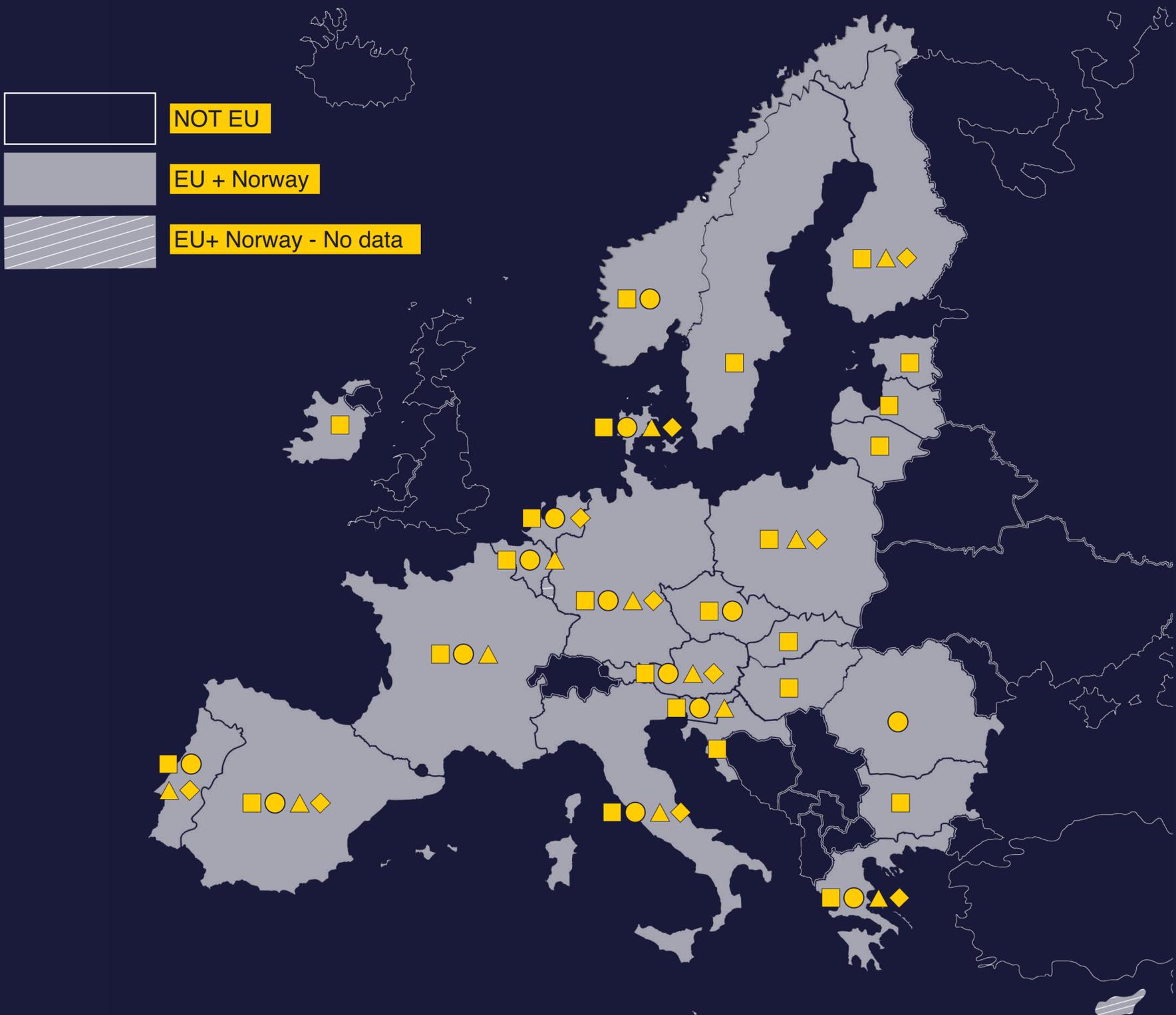


In recent months, users have increasingly turned to AI chatbots as fact-checkers, inadvertently contributing to the spread of disinformation. Specifically, images coming from Gaza and showing Palestinians' suffering have been wrongfully attributed to different contexts. In another example, Grok AI has described the photo of a poor family during Franco's regime in Spain as being taken in the United States. Other disinformation claims involving the use of AI include a doctored video of the Pride manifestation in London with an AI-generated violent man attacking people marching, and the photos of an alleged Ukrainian activist who joined anti-corruption protests with a dog and the sign "I am a dog, and Zelensky is a mutt".



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

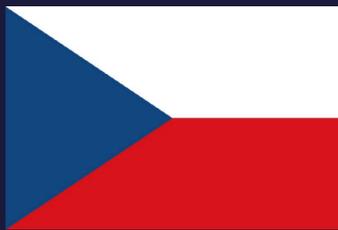
- AI-generated image of European leaders waiting in a corridor of the White House for a meeting with Trump
- Real images and videos showing Palestinian victims of Israel's military actions are framed as "false"
- ▲ Algerian boxer Imane Khelif announced her withdrawal from competitions because of the mandatory genetic tests
- ◆ Dramatic slowdown in melting of Arctic sea ice proves climate change is a hoax



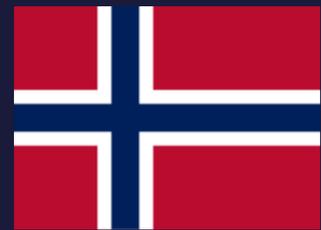
THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISINFORMATION STORIES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL:



People wanting to obtain citizenship and the right to vote by mail only need to identify themselves as a descendant of a former Czech citizen



Norway has seen a dramatic increase in youth crime



Italy has withdrawn from the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement



Mohamed is the most common name among newborns in Catalonia



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 2025. Number of respondents: 31.
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