

FIGHTING DISINFORMATION THROUGH MFF SUPPORT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY



THE CHALLENGE OF SAFEGUARDING EUROPE'S INFORMATION INTEGRITY

The EU faces ongoing threats to information integrity—disinformation, foreign interference, and manipulative influence operations—that weaken elections, media trust, and democratic participation. The European Parliament has repeatedly warned of these threats, including via the INGE and INGE2 special committees. While legislation like the DSA and initiatives like the European Democracy Action Plan are important steps, they cannot secure the information environment alone and explicitly rely on non-institutional support. Despite being given a crucial role in these contexts, civil society and research organisations remain fragmented and underfunded.

THE FUNDING GAP AND STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

Many key defenders of Europe's information space rely on non-European (often US) funding, which undermines the EU's goal of strategic autonomy. Worse still, these sources are currently shrinking. Existing EU programmes (Horizon Europe, CERV, and ad hoc tenders) offer only short-term, project-based support, making it difficult to retain skilled staff or build long-term monitoring and response capacity.

PROTECTED FUNDING FOR CIVIL SOCIETY IN AGORAEU

Protected funding under AgoraEU is essential to ensure that the DSA delivers on its promise of transparency and accountability. Policy-makers and national Digital Services Coordinators need to be able to draw on stable civil society and research resources to monitor risks, analyse platform data, and support enforcement. Without predictable funding, the DSA risks becoming a symbolic, rather than an effective, safeguard for our online safety and security.

BENEFITS OF STABLE, LONG-TERM SUPPORT

Ensuring protected, predictable funding would strengthen Europe's strategic sovereignty, demonstrate EU leadership in modernising support for civil society, and improve coherence across democracy and media freedom initiatives. It would allow for flexible, rapid, and long-term support beyond rigid tender cycles, and reinforce public trust by funding independent oversight directly and transparently.

PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT AND PROJECT OVERVIEWS

This document highlights some examples what has been achieved with current funding, demonstrating why long-term investment is necessary:

- VERA.AI: Advances AI-driven tools to help journalists, fact-checkers, and civil society detect and counter fast-evolving disinformation threats.
- ATHENA: Strengthens EU resilience to Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference through research, capability building, and cross-sector collaboration.
- EDMO BELUX 2.0: Provides multilingual fact-checking, disinformation research, media literacy, and policy input.



VERAAI PROJECT REPORTING

- Website: <https://www.veraai.eu/home>
- Funder(s): European Commission, HORIZON Research and Innovation Actions (Call: HORIZON-CL4-2021-HUMAN-01)
- Start date: 15 September 2022
- End date: 14 November 2025

Project description & purpose

The veraAI project (VERification Assisted by Artificial Intelligence) developed a comprehensive and user-friendly AI-supported verification ecosystem designed to detect and counter advanced forms of disinformation and malicious information manipulation. It strengthened the technological capacities and resilience of journalists, fact-checkers, researchers, and civil society organisations confronted with the rapid evolution of AI-generated and AI-amplified disinformation threats.

The project places strong emphasis on interdisciplinary and cross-border collaboration, combining technological innovation with legal, ethical, and societal analysis. This ensures that the tools and frameworks developed aligned with European values, while remaining practically relevant for operational users in real world disinformation response environments.

Relevant EU policy / law to the project

- AI Act (Regulation 2024/1689)
- Digital Services Act (Regulation 2022/2065)
- General Data Protection Regulation (Regulation 2016/679)

Key findings and project outcomes:

- Creation of open-source, human-in-the-loop AI tools for content verification (Invid plugin has +150k users worldwide) tailored to the needs of professional users (e.g., journalists, fact-checkers, researchers)
- Creation of explainable AI models to detect manipulation (text, image, video, deepfakes, audio) with comprehensive explanations
- Design of risk mitigation strategies for harmful AI-generated content
- Establishment of a multi-stakeholder community to co-develop and test tools
- Research on deepfake detection, synthetic media, algorithmic manipulation and content attribution
- Public datasets to support trustworthy verification workflows
- Contribution to debates on trustworthy AI in the fight against disinformation

Project added value:

- AI as a strategic enabler: projects like veraAI demonstrate how artificial intelligence can drastically improve the capacity of journalists, fact-checkers, and civil society to detect and counter fast-evolving disinformation threats - including deepfakes, coordinated manipulation, and synthetic content
- Bridging technical and societal gaps: by combining AI tool development with legal, ethical, and policy analysis, such initiatives help operational actors navigate complex risks while remaining compliant with EU frameworks like the DSA and the GDPR
- Sustainable resilience building: continued funding is essential to turn temporary project outputs into lasting, community-owned infrastructures for verification, knowledge sharing, and deterrence

Project-related public events

- veraAI website featuring all the events: <https://www.veraai.eu/home>
- EU DisinfoLab webinars: <https://www.disinfo.eu/outreach/our-webinars/29-august-advancing-synthetic-media-detection-introducing-veraai/>
- Final project events: <https://www.veraai.eu/posts/two-veraai-events-in-june-2025>



ATHENA PROJECT REPORTING

- Website: <https://project-athena.eu/>
- Funder(s): European Commission, HORIZON Research and Innovation Actions (Call: HORIZON-CL2-2023-DEMOCRACY-01)
- Start date: November 2023
- End date: October 2026

Project description & purpose

ATHENA strengthens the EU's resilience to Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) through research, capacity building, and cross-sector collaboration. It develops tools and frameworks for identifying, analysing, and mitigating FIMI campaigns, drawing from 30 real-world FIMI case studies and stakeholder insights across academia, civil society, media, and public institutions. Specifically, it focuses on understanding, exposing, and countering disinformation threats, while building a toolbox for detection, response, and deterrence.

ATHENA supports policy-makers, researchers, civil society, and journalists by offering:

- A structured typology of FIMI techniques and countermeasures
- A centralised FIMI dashboard for monitoring emerging threats
- Training modules and best practice recommendations

EU policy / law relevant to the project

- Digital Services Act (Regulation 2022/2065)
- European Media Freedom Act (Regulation 2024/1083)
- Regulation on the transparency and targeting of political advertising (Regulation 2024/900) Code of Practice / Conduct on Disinformation

Key findings and project outcomes

- Mapping of FIMI (30 case studies) across the EU and globally
- Development of a taxonomy and impact-driven classification of countermeasures
- Legal and regulatory gap analysis in enforcement
- Tools to support detection and response
- Best practice guidance for EU defenders

Projects-related public events

- ATHENA website featuring all the events: <https://project-athena.eu/>
- EU DisinfoLab webinar on a case study: <https://www.disinfo.eu/outreach/our-webinars/17-april-disinformation-and-real-estate-exploitation-the-case-of-varosha/>



EDMO BELUX 2.0 PROJECT REPORTING

- Website: <https://belux.edmo.eu/>
- Funder(s): European Union; Digital Europe Programme (Call: DIGITAL-2023-DEPLOY-04-EDMO-HUBS)
- Start date: May 2024
- End date: November 2026

Project description & purpose

EDMO BELUX is a regional hub of the European Digital Media Observatory focusing on disinformation detection, analysis, and media literacy in Belgium and Luxembourg. It brings together fact-checkers, researchers, and media educators to improve societal resilience.

Purpose for the community:

- Multilingual fact-checking (FR, NL, DE, EN, LU)
- Research into disinformation trends and platform dynamics
- Public education and media literacy outreach
- Input into policy and regulation discussions

EU policy / law relevant to the project:

- Digital Services Act (Regulation 2022/2065)
- European Media Freedom Act (Regulation 2024/1083)
- Regulation on the transparency and targeting of political advertising (Regulation 2024/900)

Key findings and project outcomes:

- Regular reports on disinformation trends in BE/LUX
- Data collection and analysis on platform enforcement and transparency
- Recommendations for effective counter-disinformation practices
- Youth-focused education campaigns and training sessions

Project-related public events

- EDMO website featuring all events: <https://belux.edmo.eu/>
- EU DisinfoLab webinar on Code of practice on disinformation report: <https://www.disinfo.eu/outreach/our-webinars/11-september-the-eu-code-of-practice-on-disinformation/>
- EDMO lunch lecture: <https://belux.edmo.eu/about-us/events-posts/>

EU DISINFO LAB



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