Code of Practice on Disinformation – Report of Fundación Maldita.es for the period January 1 to June 30, 2024

Executive summary

Executive summary (max. 2 pages)

Maldita.es is a non-profit foundation based in Spain that <u>builds public trust and fosters a healthy information ecosystem for all</u> by fighting disinformation and promoting transparency through journalism, education, technology, research and policy action. Our multidisciplinary approach is rooted in evidence-based journalistic and investigative techniques supported by cutting edge and award-winning technological development that drives our educational, research and policy action in collaboration with a unique, extensive and international community of citizens, partners, and stakeholders. This pioneering and holistic response to disinformation is founded on an innovative, wide-ranging, and globally-recognised set of expertise that establishes us as a leading international reference in the fight against disinformation.

Our mission is to provide all actors affected—from legislators and digital platforms to journalists, citizens & educators— with tools, capacities, and evidence-based information so that they can make informed decisions, and together we can foster a more resilient, accessible, and trustworthy media & information ecosystem.

As part of Maldita.es' goal of **strengthening the European fact-checking community through better cooperation,** Maldita.es currently holds the presidency of European Fact-Checking Network's governance body. The EFCSN has made an effort to assist small fact-checking organisations by encouraging the development of technical capacity (such as the creation of enhanced databases) and skill sets (such as advocacy capabilities) to strengthen their contribution to the fight against disinformation.

Moreover, there is no doubt that cooperation is one of the best practices for fact-checking, especially in times of crisis or elections. In the context of the 2024 European Parliamentary elections, Maldita.es participated in the **EFCSN's Elections24Check project**, the first of its kind database that gathered and categorised fact-checked information for European countries and citizens ahead of the 2024 European elections. Maldita.es played a pivotal role in conceptualising and developing this project for the EFCSN. It led the effort to harmonise data across the community, engaging with partners to establish a common language and creating user-friendly tools for fact-checkers to efficiently collect and input data. Maldita.es was one of the main contributors to the database among over 40 European fact-checking organisations participating, providing 1 out of 10 pieces of content (debunks, prebunks, fact-checks, etc.) registered in the database as of the last day of the elections. With Maldita.es playing a key coordinating role, this project was successfully negotiated and implemented, alongside other EFCSN election-related initiatives such as the Meta AI project and the Climate initiative from the ECF.

Following its participation in the EFCSN's Elections24Check project, Maldita.es elaborated an ex-post investigation to analyse the **[response of five very large online platforms to debunked disinformation registered in the Elections24Check database](#)** during the EU Election 2024, whose results were shared with Maldita.es' stakeholders and in the press. Maldita.es also participated in a number of forums sharing their insights on fighting disinformation during the EU Elections such as the conference on "**[Disinformation, Media and the Future of the EU](#)**" with leading communication professionals, researchers and other experts on 27 May 2024, and the webinar "**[Separating voice from noise: Insights from the 2024 EP Elections](#)**" organised by Access Democracy and Democracy

Reporting International on 27 June 2024. Using the data from the Elections24Check database, Maldita.es published a couple of articles on [disinformation against institutions](#) and on [disinformation on migrants during the European elections](#).

Maldita.es also participated in the **Working Group on Elections** and in the creation of the **Rapid Response System** within this group which was used both for the EP Elections and the French parliamentary elections.

Apart from this election-specific initiatives, Maldita.es continued its collaboration with the **Information Sharing and Analysis Center on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI-ISAC)**, a group of like-minded organisations that engage in protecting democratic societies, institutions, and the critical information infrastructures of democracy from external manipulation and harm. Maldita.es participated in the consultation process for the creation of the experts group and in its actively participating on its development.

Guidelines for filling out the report
Crisis and elections reporting template

Relevant signatories are asked to provide proportionate and appropriate information and data during a period of crisis and during an election. Reporting is a part of a special chapter at the end of the harmonised reporting template and should follow the guidelines:

- The reporting of signatories' actions should be as specific to the particular crisis or election reported on as possible. To this extent, the rows on "Specific Action[s]" should be filled in with actions that are either put in place specifically for a particular event (for example a media literacy campaign on disinformation related to the Ukraine war, an information panel for the European elections), or to explain in more detail how an action that forms part of the service's general approach to implementing the Code is implemented in the specific context of the crisis or election reported on (for example, what types of narratives in a particular election/crisis would fall into scope of a particular policy of the service, what forms of advertising are ineligible).
- Signatories who are not offering very large online platform services and who follow the invitation to report on their specific actions for a particular election or crisis may adapt the reporting template as follows:
  - They may remove the "Policies and Terms and Conditions" section of the template, or use it to report on any important changes in their internal rules applicable to a particular election or crisis (for example, a change in editorial guidelines for fact-checkers specific to the particular election or crisis)
  - They may remove any Chapter Section of the Reporting Template (Scrutiny of Ads Placement, Political Advertising, Integrity of Services etc.) that is not relevant to their activities
- The harmonised reporting template should be filled in by adding additional rows for each item reported on. This means that rather than combined/bulk reporting such as "Depending on severity of violation, we demote or remove content based on policies X, Y, Z", there should be individual rows stating for example "Under Policy X, content is demoted or removed based on severity", "Under Policy Y, content […]" etc.
- The rows should be colour-coded to indicate which service is being reported on, using the same colour code as for the overall harmonised reporting template.

Reporting should be brief and to the point, with a suggested character limit entry of 2000 characters.

Uploading data to the Transparency Centre

The reports should be submitted to the Commission in the form of the pdf via e-mail to the address CNECT COP TASK FORCE CNECT-COP-TASK-FORCE@ec.europa.eu within the agreed deadline. Signatories will upload all data from the harmonised reporting template to the Transparency Centre, allowing easy data access and filtering within the agreed deadline. It is the responsibility of the signatories to ensure that the uploading takes place and is executed on time. Signatories are also responsible to ensure that the Transparency Centre is operational and functional by the time of the reports' submission that the data from the reports are uploaded and made accessible in the Transparency Centre within the above deadline, and that users are able to read, search, filer and download data as needed in a user-friendly way and format.

Reporting on the signatory's response during an election

Reporting on the signatory's response during an election
2024 European Parliament Elections

Threats observed during the electoral period:

In our analysis on "Platform Response to Disinformation during the EU Election 2024" we observed that the five analysed very large online platforms (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X and YouTube) did not act against half of the content debunked by independent fact-checking organisations across Europe ahead of the EP Elections (over 1,300 publications). No visible action was taken on 75% of disinformation content on YouTube and 70% on X, while Facebook responded to 88% of debunked posts, Instagram to 70%, and TikTok to 40%. The 20 most viral posts or videos that received no action by the platforms hosting them accumulate over 1,5 million views each.

Full results here: https://files.maldita.es/maldita/2024/06/platform_response_to_disinformation_during_the_eu_election.pdf

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Mitigations in place during the electoral period:

Following the results of the analysis of platforms response to debunked disinformation, Maldita.es shared the results of the study with Maldita.es' stakeholders and in the press, including during the Plenary meeting of the Permanent Task-Force of the Code of Practice on Disinformation, with the intention of bringing public attention to the lack of action of these platforms on disinformation during the electoral period.

This analysis was a result of Maldita's involvement in the EFCSN's project Elections24Check, to which we contributed with over 300 articles related to disinformation on the elections. During the electoral campaign and on the date of the EP elections itself, Maldita provided full coverage which included monitoring disinformation, verification and debunking of hoaxes, analysis of trends, and creation of pre-bunking and explanatory content for our community. Maldita also organised an event in which the speakers reflected on how disinformation narratives are influencing public perception and the European electoral process.

Empowering the Fact-Checking Community

Outline approaches pertinent to this chapter, highlighting similarities/commonalities and differences with regular enforcement.

Compliance with standards (Commitment 33, Measure 33.1)	Description of intervention:
	Maldita.es is one of the founders and an active actor of the European Fact-Checking Network (EFCSN). Currently holds the chairmanship of the association's governance body. We have updated our methodologies, policies and procedures to make them even more transparent and accessible, in order to be compliant with the EFCSN Code of Standards.
	Maldita.es has also been a verified signatory of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) Code of Principles since 2018 and has undergone the assessment procedure each year since then. The assessment is accessible here and our declarations on methodology, organisational transparency, and neutrality are also public on our website.
	Indication of impact including relevant metrics when available: