Code of Practice on Disinformation – Report of Reporters without Borders for the period January 2023 – January 2024

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Executive summary

Executive summary (max. 2 pages)

RSF's specific engagement with the code of practice is focused around Commitment 22 which incites relevant signatories to provide users with tools to make more informed decisions when they encounter online information. Pursuant to its engagement with the code, RSF will report on the Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI), a tool provided by RSF in an effort to empower users through the development and implementation of indicators for trustworthiness of journalism and thus, promoting and rewarding compliance with professional norms and ethics.

The Journalism Trust Initiative, initiated and operated by RSF, is an internal compliance and external accountability and transparency tool for newsrooms of all sizes and types. It is based on an official standardization deliverable, the CWA17493:2019, according to EU law and translates the self-assessments and independent third-party audits of media outlets into a machine-readable trustworthiness indicator as referenced in the Code of Practice.

Besides, RSF is focusing on stimulating the enabling environment to support the usage and positive impact of the JTI. This includes private and public sector incentives, such as algorithmic indexation in search, social media and programmatic advertising, but also co-regulatory frameworks to elevate the findability and prominence of JTI compliant sources of information. In that perspective, RSF has received commitments of the VLOP Microsoft to include the JTI dataset to favour new sources providing guarantees of transparency and professionalism practices in flagship products such as the search engine Bing. The implementation of the JTI dataset will start in Q1 2024. In 2023, the tracing authenticity tool Newsback had also implemented JTI dataset in its products but the company has closed at the end of the year.

After the Code of Practice on Desinformation, the JTI benefited from another explicit reference in the recitals of the proposed European Media Freedom Act (article 17 and recital 33)) encouraging the use of JTI as a benchmark for identifying reliable news media. These references represent an important step forward for prominence of trustworthy and ethical journalism throughout the European Union. Tools such as the JTI should become relevant criteria in defining and promoting media content as part of the efforts that platforms are expected to undertake to combat disinformation.

Internationally, the Journalism Trust Initiative has grown in 2023 from 500 media involved to +1000 media with a particular growth at the European level with 256 media involved in 25 countries and 66 media having published their transparency reports. RSF expects to double this number in 2024 and facilitate access to the certification thanks to a grant system and individual support to help media outlets accessing the JTI compliance. More globally RSF is working on expanding its impact by developing its certifiers network. In that perspective, JTI has moved from two certifiers to 10 certifiers available in 9 countries. Rapid development of the initiative in Africa and South-East Asia has been noticed in 2023 reaching the symbolic number of 1000 media involved across the world. The objective for 2024 is to involve another 1000 media outlets in the self-assessment stage.

Baseline reports are detailing how Signatories have implemented their Commitments under the Code and provide the Qualitative Reporting Elements (QREs) and Service Level Indicators (SLIs), as they stand one month after the implementation. The baseline report should also include a comparison between the measures in place under the previous Code to the measures taken to implement the new Code. The measures taken to implement the new Code should be outlined per commitment in the dedicated field of the reporting template.

Reporting period

The reporting period to be covered in the baseline reports is from 16 December 2022 to 16 January 2023 for all Signatories. (The implementation period of the Code from 16 June 2022 to 16 December 2022 is followed by a one-month reporting period from 16 December 2022 to 16 January 2023.) Signatories shall submit baseline reports outlining policy updates and actions taken to implement the Code during the implementation period. Data, e.g. on the number of actions taken under a specific policy, should be reported on from the end of the implementation period (16 December 2022) until the cut-off date of 16 January 2023. In case specific data is not available for the first reporting period (from 16 December 2022 to 16 January 2023), please provide the monthly average based on the previous quarter, clearly outlining the methodology used in the relevant field. The submission date for baseline reports is January 31, 2023.

Adjusting the reporting template

Non-VLOPs can adapt the template to specific commitments and measures they subscribed to. This may include adapted wording for commitments, measures, QREs and SLIs. Non-VLOPs signatories will report only on commitments and measures they subscribed to and provide Member State-level data only if feasible.

Reporting per Service

When filling in a report for several services, use colour codes to clearly distinguish between services. At the beginning of the report, clarify what colour is used for which service.

Reporting in text form

Reporting in the form of written text is required for several parts of the report. Most of them are accompanied by a target character limit. Please stick to the target character limit as much as possible. We encourage you to use bullet points and short sentences. Links should only be used to provide examples or to illustrate the point. They should not be used to replace explanations or to provide data in the forms. All relevant explanations and data must be included in the table directly, in written form.

Reporting SLIs and data

Reporting on Service Level Indicators requires quantitative information to be reported in the reporting template. We ask you to report data in the format provided by the reporting template, not on external links.

Reporting on TTPs

If subscribed to Commitment 14, Integrity of Services, we ask you to report on each identified TTP individually. The number of identified TTPs may vary per service. Where more than one TTP are reported under the same action, clarify the reasoning in the methodology. Where input is not provided, keep the placeholder for the relevant TTP and explain reasons and planned remedial action. Additionally, as with all other SLIs, data can be provided per Member State for each individual TTP.

Missing Data

In case that at the time of reporting there is no data available yet, the data is insufficient or the methodology is lacking, please outline in the dedicated field (i.e. in the field about further implementation measures planned) how this will be addressed over the upcoming six months, being as specific as possible. Please also indicate inconsistencies or gaps regarding methodology in the field dedicated to methodology.

Attachments

We ask you not to enclose any additional attachments to the harmonised reporting template.

Uploading data to the Transparency Centre

After the submission of the baseline reports and the launch of the Transparency Centre website, all data from the reporting template must be uploaded to the Transparency Centre within maximum 7 days, allowing easy data access

and filtering. 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.

V. Empowering Users
Commitment 22
Relevant Signatories commit to provide users with tools to help them make more informed decisions when they encounter online information that may be false or misleading, and to facilitate user access to tools and information to assess the trustworthiness of information sources, such as indicators of trustworthiness for informed online navigation, particularly relating to societal issues or debates of general interest. [change wording if adapted]

Measure 22.4	[insert wording if adapted]
QRE 22.4.1	- Criteria used in the JTI mechanism are disclosed in the international standard (CEN 17493) and is the result of a self-regulatory process concluded in December 2019 - To ensure these criteria are apolitical, unbiased, and independent and relevant for journalism practitioners, a representative committee of +120 participants from the journalism community has been gathered to create this international standard (list of participants *page 4 to 7*) - The CEN 17493's 18 clauses have been transferred into a self evaluation and auditable questionnaire made of 129 questions. - Moreover, the questionnaire has been converted into an online tool accessible to every type of media outlet so that all publishers can pass the self-assessment (link: www.jti-app.com) - The transparency reports published by media outlets are disclosed on a specific page accessible to the general public. - On each JTI certification document, is identified the certification body (e.g. here) that has done the audit of the publisher and the accreditation scheme in Europe is being advanced. In 2023, the number of certifiers approved to audit on JTI increased from two to ten in nine countries across the world.

Measure 22.5	[insert wording if adapted]
QRE 22.5.1	- The Journalism Trust Initiative standard (CEN 17493) is valid for 3 years and re-assessed at its expirations date (here Dec 2022). A list of feedback regarding the criteria of the self-assessment (on jti-app) is collected from media outlets and partners in anticipation of the re-assessment of the Journalism Trust Initiative standard (CEN 17493) by its creation committee in December 2025. - The JTI certification mark is granted for two years to media outlets - The JTI programme, currently being reviewed by the European accreditors, specifies that media outlets shall continuously update relevant data and information that's relevant for the certification and notify the certification body of changes immediately via the jti:app; - Any change made by publishers in their self-assessment to the Journalism Trust Initiative standard is automatically updated in their transparency report (document synthesizing the self-assessment). On each transparency report, the date of the last update is clearly indicated. (E.g. here)

SLI 22.5.2 – actions enforcing policies above	Methodology of data measurement [suggested character limit: 500 characters]
	- RSF is considering engaging in an impact study assessing the number of publishers that have improved their journalistic practices after being assessed will include quantitative information:
	  - Quantitative data
	    - percentage reached on the JTI self-assessment before and after improving practices
	    - if data available, increase of traffic on the publishers websites and social media accounts
	    - if data available, increase on ads revenue
	  - Qualitative data
	    - testimonials from editorial management on skills development of their team members
	    - testimonials from editorial staff on improvement on its practices
	    - testimonials of HR team regarding onboarding of new journalists
	- RSF is currently continuing its efforts in order to secure incentives for media outlets who have either published their transparency report or been audited by a certifier. These incentives can be granted, among others, by : advertisers; search engines, news aggregators and social media; funders…
	
	- The major incentive secured in 2023 is the inclusion by Microsoft of JTI dataset within Bing search engine to favour news sources presenting guarantees of transparency and professionalism (JTI certified media outlets and media having published their transparency reports).
	
	- RSF is considering engaging in an impact study assessing the impact of incentives by the actors using the Journalism Trust Initiative dataset to the media outlets involved in JTI
	  - E.g. growth of traffic on media websites since Microsoft included JTI data in its Bing search engine.
	  - The inclusion of JTI dataset by Microsoft on the search engine Bing has been announced in September 2023, a certain number of months will be needed to measure the impact of visibility for media outlets involved in JTI.

	Total nr of publishers who improved their score under the trustworthiness indicator
Data	
Measure 22.6	[insert wording if adapted]
QRE 22.6.1	- Self-evaluation and certification results of conforming entities are disclosed on the Journalism Trust Initiative website (https://www.journalismtrustinitiative.org/mediaoutlets) - Information disclosed: Name of publisher, date of publication, transparency report revealing information disclosed in the self-assessment
SLI 22.6.1 – actions enforcing policies above	Methodology of data measurement [suggested character limit: 500 characters] - Engagement statistics can be disclosed on engagement of publishers in the JTI process (Results on January 1st, 2024) - 1 057 publishers have started the self-assessment process (+557 in 12 months)

	- 165 have finalized the self-evaluation and published the results in the form of a transparency report (+117 in 12 months) - 28 publishers have been audited and certified by independent certifiers (+15 in 12 months)
Data	

VIII. Transparency Centre
Commitment 34
To ensure transparency and accountability around the implementation of this Code, Relevant Signatories commit to set up and maintain a publicly available common Transparency Centre website. [change wording if adapted]

Measure 34.3	[insert wording if adapted]
Measure 34.4	[insert wording if adapted]
Measure 34.5	[insert wording if adapted]

VIII. Transparency Centre
Commitment 35
Signatories commit to ensure that the Transparency Centre contains all the relevant information related to the implementation of the Code's Commitments and Measures and that this information is presented in an easy-to-understand manner, per service, and is easily searchable. [change wording if adapted]

Measure 35.3	[insert wording if adapted]
Measure 35.5	[insert wording if adapted]

VIII. Transparency Centre	
Commitment 36	
Signatories commit to updating the relevant information contained in the Transparency Centre in a timely and complete manner. [change wording if adapted]	
Measure 36.1	[insert wording if adapted]
Measure 36.2	[insert wording if adapted]
Measure 36.3	[insert wording if adapted]
QRE 36.1.1 (for the Commitments 34–36) [insert wording if adapted]	Outline relevant actions [suggested character limit: 2000 characters] We are pleased to confirm that we have been an active participant in the subgroup that has successfully launched the common Transparency Centre this year. We have assisted with establishing the website's requirements, selecting a vendor to build the website and overseeing the development of the website's key functionalities and interface. We have ensured that the Center will allow the general public to access general information about the Code as well as the underlying reports (and for the Center to be navigated both by commitment and signatory). Each signatory will be responsible for ensuring that the information they upload to the website is correct and accurate. Entities interested in joining the Code's task-force will be able to sign up through a dedicated online application form on the website.
QRE 36.1.2 (for the Commitments 34–36) [insert wording if adapted]	Outline relevant actions [suggested character limit: 2000 characters]
SLI 36.1.1 – (for Measures 34 and 36) meaningful quantitative information on the usage of the Transparency Centre, such as the average monthly visits of the webpage [change wording if adapted]	Methodology of data measurement [suggested character limit: 500 characters]
	Our company would like to provide following data:
Data	

IX. Permanent Task-Force	
Commitment 37	
Signatories commit to participate in the permanent Task-force. The Task-force includes the Signatories of the Code and representatives from EDMO and ERGA. It is chaired by the European Commission, and includes representatives of the European External Action Service (EEAS). The Task-force can also invite relevant experts as observers to support its work. Decisions of the Task-force are made by consensus. [change wording if adapted]	
Measure 37.1	[insert wording if adapted]

X. Monitoring of Code
Commitment 38
The Signatories commit to dedicate adequate financial and human resources and put in place appropriate internal processes to ensure the implementation of their commitments under the Code. [change wording if adapted]

Measure 38.1	[insert wording if adapted]
QRE 38.1.1 [insert wording if adapted]	Outline relevant actions [suggested character limit: 2000 characters] RSF uses a "market solution" meaning that JTI deployment is organized country by country with dissemination campaigns towards local organizations and direct campaigns dedicated to media outlets. This approach also entails a progressive development of its certifiers network worldwide, including in Europe. The JTI team has been reinforced to support media outlets in their access to compliance with the Journalism Trust Initiative standard. Two full-time collaborators have joined the Paris office, and 3 country representatives part-time are dedicated to help media outlets joining the initiative. As of January 2024, 256 european media from 25 european countries have started the self-evaluation process (+123 in 12 months) and 66 have published their JTI transparency reports.

X. Monitoring of Code
Commitment 39
Signatories commit to provide to the European Commission, within 1 month after the end of the implementation period (6 months after this Code's signature) the baseline reports as set out in the Preamble. [change wording if adapted]

X. Monitoring of Code
Commitment 40
Signatories commit to provide regular reporting on Service Level Indicators (SLIs) and Qualitative Reporting Elements (QREs). The reports and data provided should allow for a thorough assessment of the extent of the implementation of the Code's Commitments and Measures by each Signatory, service and at Member State level. [change wording if adapted]

Measure 40.2	[insert wording if adapted]

Measure 40.3	[insert wording if adapted]
Measure 40.4	[insert wording if adapted]
Measure 40.5	[insert wording if adapted]
Measure 40.6	[insert wording if adapted]

X. Monitoring of Code
Commitment 42
Relevant Signatories commit to provide, in special situations like elections or crisis, upon request of the European Commission, proportionate and appropriate information and data, including ad-hoc specific reports and specific chapters within the regular monitoring, in accordance with the rapid response system established by the Taskforce. [change wording if adapted]

X. Monitoring of Code
Commitment 43
Relevant Signatories commit to provide, in special situations like elections or crisis, upon request of the European Commission, proportionate and appropriate information and data, including ad-hoc specific reports and specific chapters within the regular monitoring, in accordance with the rapid response system established by the Taskforce. [change wording if adapted]