



EDMO Advisory Board Guidance on Scientific priorities for 2023 EMIF calls in Focus Areas 2, 3 and 4

The European Digital Media Observatory acts in a scientific advisory role to the European Media and Information Fund (EMIF). The present document summarises the EDMO Advisory Board recommendations regarding the scientific priorities to be reflected in the upcoming calls, which EMIF will publish at the end of January 2023 in respect of its [focus areas](#) #2 (Multidisciplinary Investigations on Disinformation), #3 (Research – Studies and Sandboxes), and #4 (Actions in support of Media Literacy).

Overall, the EDMO Advisory Board converged around the idea that the scientific focus and the research topics for the different areas should be kept broad in scope, so as to allow for flexibility and enable applicants to propose themselves what they consider the most relevant aspects of EDMO's Scientific Focus, taking into account the specificities of their own information environment, and without frustrating creativity. In this regard, it was felt that [EDMO's Scientific Focus](#) document already provides a solid framework for guiding the calls.

EDMO Advisory Board scientific guidance in relation to each of the different focus areas

Focus area 2: Multidisciplinary Investigations on Disinformation

The Fund's interventions will support the production of a range of multidisciplinary focus reports, covering both country-specific and thematic analyses. Examples of eligible activities include the following:

Case Reports: In-depth investigations combining expertise in fact-checking, journalism, communication, and political and social sciences, and focused on concrete cases of disinformation campaigns targeted at the European Union, or at specific Member States or linguistic areas, with a view to analysing and exposing relevant narratives and their influence on public policies. Upcoming elections, in Eastern and Central Europe as well as for the European Parliament in 2024; the ongoing (information) war in Ukraine; and the propagation of disinformation on climate change are expected to be particularly salient cases during the period covered by the next calls. Studies assessing the actions, measures and legislation introduced by the EU in the past year(s) (such as the 2022 Strengthened Code of Practice on Disinformation) and the manner in which they are (un)successful at countering the threat of disinformation would also be welcome, including structural indicators for how to accurately quantify/measure this.

Threat Analyses: Reports looking at the anatomy of disinformation and the 'disinformation lifecycle', to identify the principles, tactics and techniques that enable online media manipulations. It is assumed that



disinformation on a variety of topics is disseminated by the same group(s) of actors, which makes them potentially worthwhile objects of study, also to test the validity of this assumption. Studies can focus on agents, instigators, intermediaries and intended targets, as well as the web resources used, cross-platform and/or cross-lingual operations, online/offline interactions and emerging technological risks (e.g. deep fakes) by combining expertise in fact-checking, journalism, network science, data and computer science.

“Follow-the Money” Investigations: Reports on the role of advertising networks, influencers and other channels that enable the monetisation, or allow the sponsoring of online disinformation, with a view to tracing disinformation campaigns back to relevant funding sources and evaluating budgets. This could go beyond looking at business models to the economics of disinformation at large. One understudied and potentially worthwhile avenue for further study is the (black) market for data brokers and data(bases), which can include but are not limited to user accounts and behavioural data, and how these contribute to the spread of disinformation. Collaborations between journalists, economists and experts in digital advertising and media would be essential for a proper understanding of such mechanisms.

Polling and Impact assessments: The grants could support data collection and analyses on media usage, news consumption, trust levels, and measurements regarding the impact of disinformation on relevant European audiences and in different European markets, taking into account the specific characteristics of national media and information environments.

EDMO Advisory Board scientific guidance on focus area 2

The Case Reports and the “Follow-the Money” Investigations were considered particularly valuable, with the latter being flagged as the most urgent. Further, the Media literacy Reports, and in particular mapping the most relevant and recent initiatives across Europe, were considered a priority step with a view to generating updated insights enabling EMIF to refine its funding activities under Focus Area 4 (below). Threat Analyses were also highlighted as an important area of funding.

Focus area 3: Research – Studies and Sandboxes

Large and deep scientific studies requiring close collaboration between different disciplines and entities, including academic researchers, technology providers, media and civil society organisations are supported by EMIF under these calls.

Grants fund the production of studies on fundamental epistemological issues linked to the digital transformation of the media landscape, and involving a variety of political, economic, sociological and psychological aspects. Studies on the economic and socio-political incentives to spread disinformation, and on the factors within a society that give rise to, and foster, the propagation of disinformation are particularly welcome. What levels of trust are present in European societies, and how can these be preserved and built upon in order to increase resilience against disinformation. The current media sphere



subjects people to a constant information overabundance, which takes its toll in various forms and with diverse societal results. This is exacerbated by specific cases such as the war in Ukraine, which merit study.

Other avenues for further study include research on the effects of new technologies, such as AI, on cognitive processes and civic behaviour, as well as the emergence of new forms of social interactions and democratic participation enabled by digital media. The elaboration of appropriate methodologies to assess the impact of disinformation on the public sphere, and to evaluate the effectiveness of policy responses, especially through comparative study and systemic impact indicators, is also supported. With the rise of deep- and cheapfakes, means to establish and preserve authenticity of visual media content will be pertinent in the future.

Projects with a more technical and/or methodological focus can involve the development of testing environments (sandboxes) to experiment with software applications, automatic detection of disinformation and/or analysis of its online propagation patterns, or reverse engineering of closed-off or encrypted networks. With certain (social) media platforms and types of data being more popular objects of study than others, due to differences in audience reach and/or data accessibility, the Fund welcomes research with a focus on understudied or relatively difficult to study types of media, platforms and data. The new EU Code of Practice on Disinformation allows for access to new data, which new projects can utilise.

EDMO Advisory Board scientific guidance on focus area 3

The EDMO Advisory Board felt that, in this area, EMIF calls should be phrased in such a manner as to leave a wide margin of flexibility and discretion to applicants, while also encouraging proposals that (a) fill existing gaps in relevant literature by combining perspectives from different disciplines, (b) deploy new methodologies and aim to answer fundamental human and societal questions surrounding disinformation and (c) lay out standards/frameworks/approaches for better understanding social harms resulting from different forms of media manipulation. The need for work that moves theoretical studies forward and combines innovative theoretical approaches with practical testing and implementation of remedial measures was also emphasised. This requires an inclusive approach, supporting ambitious trans-disciplinary and trans-national projects, rather than a series of small-scale, one-off studies in single disciplines.

In terms of thematic focus areas, as pointed out above, applicants should refer to EDMO's Scientific Focus as a basis for defining their proposals. When it comes to identifying gaps in current analytical approaches, the key requirement should be to ensure that proposals adopt a strong trans-disciplinary focus.

Focus area 4: Actions in Support of Media Literacy

This funding window supports initiatives aimed at increasing the level of media literacy in Europe through effective cooperation among educational institutions, academia, civil society organisations, media outlets, media literacy organisations and online platforms. Examples of eligible activities include the following:



Projects devoted to intellectual synthesis of the nature of media literacy, drawing on insights from traditional and new approaches to media, information and digital literacy, to support a clear theoretical framework and measurable indicators of media literacy among the public.

Design and delivery of appropriate, replicable training and training materials for schoolteachers and/or educators active in out-of-school contexts, including sharing of best practices across linguistic, state and cultural borders ('train-the-trainers' approach). These efforts can include critical analysis of the diverse approaches being implemented across Europe to improve media literacy, identification of effective and less effective approaches, and recommendations for future programmes. If possible, collaborations with ministries to work on school curricula could be incentivized.

Development of multilingual educational materials targeted at different age, linguistic and/or cultural groups, with a particular focus on at-risk, marginalised or hard-to-reach subgroups within the wider public. The development of an intellectual framework and effective methodology for improving media literacy for these vulnerable groups can be particularly useful. These materials can include tools based on innovative pedagogical approaches, including gaming and creative uses of remote learning methodologies, to be used by trained teachers and educators.

Development of software applications, tools and innovative methodologies to identify possible instances of disinformation, promote the use of fact-checking services and reporting by social media users, and/or raise awareness about the danger of receiving and propagating disinformation.

Media Literacy Reports: The focus of these reports would be on mapping concrete media literacy initiatives at European level, describing their actions and methodological approaches, and evaluating their impact.

EDMO Advisory Board scientific guidance on focus area 4

The EDMO Advisory Board emphasised the importance of taking into account the outcomes of future Media literacy Reports in Focus area 2, as discussed above, given that there is a lot of activity in the EU in this space.

In general, rethinking media literacy as digital literacy was seen as important, as well as thinking along a lifespan perspective, so that target groups for media literacy initiatives would not only be young people, but also elderly demographic groups and other social or professional profiles. Further, the "train-the-trainers" approach was highlighted as a particularly important area for funding under the first 2022 EMIF call.