



EDMO Advisory Council Guidance on Scientific priorities for the 2024 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 Council recommendations regarding the scientific priorities to be reflected in the upcoming calls, which EMIF will publish at the end of January 2024 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 Council 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.

An overarching priority for all areas of intervention is impact assessment. Considering the fact that the first cohort of EMIF-funded projects are completed, and many others are approaching completion, as well as the ongoing implementation of various EU regulations and other initiatives to counter disinformation, it is of the utmost importance to gain insight into the impact that these initiatives may have had in Europe. The delivery of indicators and metrics that provide clear, transparent and quantifiable assessments of the outcomes and/or effectiveness of the above are considered crucial. New projects can include such metrics in their deliverables, but impact assessment would also be a suitable topic for a project in itself.

EDMO Advisory Council 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, computer sciences 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 EU Member States as well as for the European Parliament in 2024; the ongoing (information) wars in Ukraine and Israel-Hamas; and the propagation of disinformation on climate change, are expected to be



particularly salient cases during the period covered by the next calls. Other avenues to explore are campaigns conducted by new or increasingly important (state) actors. The manner in which various forms of disinformation spread and are amplified on various social media, in various languages, and the response from these media to this, remain as important as ever for the study of the disinformation landscape in Europe. 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, the Digital Services Act and the AI Act) and their effectiveness in countering the threat of disinformation would also be welcome, including operationalisations for how to accurately quantify/measure this.

Threat Analyses: 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. One valuable avenue for research could be identifying how disinformation proliferation on platforms may affect advertisers' interests in these platforms. 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.

"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 Council Scientific Guidance on focus area 2

The Case Reports and the "Follow-the Money" Investigations were considered particularly valuable. A specific priority should be given to (i) Case Reports focusing on disinformation related to the Israel-Hamas conflict, including its influence on military operations, diplomatic efforts and positioning of European policies towards the evolving situation in the Middle East, as well as (ii) the upcoming 2024 EP elections, including spillovers of disinformation narratives emerged during the electoral campaign on post-election politics. Given their time sensitivity, the Advisory Council invites EMIF to explore



ways to create a fast-track for proposals addressing one of these two topics. Further, 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 media landscape, and involving a variety of political, economic, sociological and psychological aspects. Proposals with a neuroscientific focus are welcome as well. 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. Other studies can assess 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. All of the aforementioned studies can contribute to a better understanding of societies' vulnerabilities to disinformation, which can inform both proactive approaches and counter-measures against the spread of disinformation. The current media sphere entails 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, and Israel-Hamas, which merit study.

Other avenues for further study include research on the effects of new technologies on cognitive processes and civic behaviour, as well as the emergence of new forms of social interactions and democratic participation enabled by digital media. Recommender systems remain an important topic of study. Rapid developments in the capabilities of generative AI, and the use thereof for the creation and spread of disinformation, have made the study thereof particularly salient, also in order to explore how AI can be used to identify and counter disinformation. With the rise of deep and cheap fakes, means to establish and preserve authenticity of audio and visual media content will be pertinent in the future, especially in light of preserving public trust in media and reliable information.

The elaboration of appropriate methodologies to assess the impact of disinformation on the public sphere, and to evaluate the effectiveness of measures taken by platforms to address algorithmic biases and ensure findability and discoverability of trustworthy information, the effectivity of demonetizing disinformation content, as well as the impact of policy responses, especially through comparative studies and systemic indicators, is also supported. Initial work that has been done on the development of structural indicators, including for some of the topics mentioned above, and their implementation, invite further elaboration thereof.

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, as well as testing the capabilities and learning ability of emerging generative AI-systems. 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, data, and platforms, particularly cross-platform analyses. Transparency efforts by platforms under the Strengthened EU Code of Practice on Disinformation, and obligations to provide researchers with access to data per Article 40 of the DSA, new data may become available, which projects may utilise and evaluate. With the variety of data sources and access formats in mind, careful analysis of these and how they may best contribute to achieving certain research objectives is needed.

EDMO Advisory Council Scientific Guidance on focus area 3

The EDMO Advisory Council 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. The Advisory Council also stresses the importance of the work carried out by EDMO in the field of Structural Indicators and invites EMIF to incentivise proposals that, building on such a theoretical work, strengthen the analytical framework and provide for a concrete implementation of structural indicators across multiple European countries. In this connection, methodological research combined with implementation pilots in the field of audience measurements and monetisation of disinformation is also welcomed.

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 an assessment of best practices and the development of evaluation metrics for media literacy projects, through critical analysis of the diverse approaches that are 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.

EDMO Advisory Council Scientific Guidance on focus area 4

The EDMO Advisory Council emphasised the importance of the work undertaken by EDMO regarding the identification of best practices and the establishment of professional standards for media literacy practitioners. It invites EMIF to support initiatives that, building on such a work, are aimed at ensuring the wider possible uptake of such standards at national level, taking into account the regulatory framework set out under the AVMSD, while exploring ways to establish an advisory function to inform decisions of national authorities

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.