

R8 Addressing the Structural Issues Underlying the Tide of Disinformation

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Agenda item: 1. Resolutions

Motion text

1 What is Disinformation?

2 Disinformation is false or misleading information spread intentionally in order
3 to advance political or ideological goals, make profit, or create harm. It is
4 different to misinformation, which is false information shared unintentionally.
5 This resolution focusses on disinformation as it entails a motive to deceive,
6 therefore perpetrators are more culpable for its consequences. Further, tackling
7 disinformation reduces opportunities for misinformation to spread.

8 Why Should It Be Reduced?

9 Damage to Democracy

10 Disinformation undermines the democratic process by undermining access to
11 truthful and reliable information. For example, the outcome of the UK's 2016
12 referendum on EU membership is thought to have been influenced by false and
13 misleading information spread intentionally through traditional and social
14 media.

15 Undermining Trust

16 Disinformation both propagates general societal distrust and thrives when social
17 distrust is high, creating a vicious circle. This was illustrated during the
18 COVID-19 pandemic, when disinformation about the virus led to distrust in health
19 messaging from governments and health organisations, reducing vaccine uptake and
20 health protective behaviour.

21 Impact on Marginalised Groups

22 Disinformation frequently entails the repetition of prejudiced and hateful
23 narratives and tropes designed to reinforce existing power hierarchies that
24 propagate racism, misogyny, xenophobia and transphobia. Further, marginalisation
25 leads to institutional distrust which increases vulnerability to disinformation.
26 For example, a disproportionate number of COVID-19 deaths among minority ethnic
27 groups throughout Europe was compounded by the proliferation of disinformation
28 in these communities' media ecosystems.

29 *Warfare*

30 Disinformation forms part of information warfare: the use, control and
31 manipulation of information to advance a belligerents' goals in a military
32 conflict. For example, false narratives about the war were actively spread by
33 Russian state-controlled media and social media as part of the 2022 invasion of
34 Ukraine.

35 *Environmental Impact*

36 Disinformation has deeply worrying implications for the vital transition away
37 from fossil fuel dependency and unsustainable growth capitalism. Evidence shows
38 that oil and gas companies have long been aware of the risks their industry
39 poses to the climate, yet they have spread false information to instil doubt
40 about it, enabling them to continue business as usual.

41 For the health of our societies, our communities and our planet, it is essential
42 that we act to reduce, regulate and build resilience to disinformation. Our
43 calls are broken into three areas of action: traditional media, social media and
44 resilient societies.

45 **1. Traditional Media**

46 Limited ownership and control of traditional media creates the motive and
47 opportunity for a powerful minority to spread disinformation to consolidate
48 their power and grow their profit. To reduce disinformation, it is vital that
49 traditional media ownership is diverse and independent, and that free speech and
50 high quality journalism that holds power to account is not only preserved, but
51 incentivised.

52 **FYEG calls for:**

- 53 • Recognition that media organisations are part of the infrastructure of
54 democracy and should be run for the benefit of society, not for limited
55 private and personal gain

- 56 • Legislation to dismantle and prevent media monopolies (for example,
57 antitrust laws), so the power to create information and knowledge is not
58 held by a powerful minority

- 59 • Greater protection and facilitation of high quality independent journalism

- 60 • The formation of independent oversight bodies (or something similar to
61 suit the political and media ecosystems of different countries), separate
62 from both the state and private interests, to monitor, call out and
63 address disinformation

- 64 • The EU to stand by its commitment to free press, prioritising it as a
65 central requirement to EU membership for both existing and candidate
66 members

67 **2. Social Media**

68 The advent of social media and algorithmically-driven news feeds have provided
69 new and powerful ways of disseminating disinformation, in a targeted fashion, to
70 enormous audiences, at once-inconceivable speeds. As a consequence,
71 disinformation has overwhelmed and infiltrated our lives, sowing distrust,
72 undermining democracy and threatening the health of our planet.

73 **FYEG calls for:**

- 74 • Action to restrict social media companies' use of algorithms that
75 prioritise engagement over content veracity and quality

- 76 • Recognition of the damage caused and dangers posed to democracy by
77 analytics services that run social media disinformation campaigns for
78 clients

- 79 • Collaboration with social media companies and governments to end social
80 media disinformation campaigns, both by analytics companies and state
81 actors

- 82 • Recognition of the potential for disinformation posed by developments in

83 large language model artificial intelligence, and advocate for the pace of
84 progress in this field to be consistent with safeguarding the ethical
85 implications inherent within it

86 **3. Fostering a society with greater resilience to disinformation**

87 Increased uncertainty, such as housing insecurity, the cost of living crisis and
88 the climate emergency, and decreased trust in institutions, fostered by
89 structural oppression and negligent governance, makes people more susceptible to
90 the easy answers provided by disinformation. Tackling disinformation is a social
91 issue; disinformation-resilient societies require trust to be restored in the
92 social contract.

93 **FYEG calls for:**

- 94 • Recognition that resilience to disinformation is a social issue, it is not
95 the responsibility of individuals alone to inoculate themselves against
96 disinformation

- 97 • Efforts to be taken to reduce uncertainty and insecurity in citizen's
98 lives to be part of disinformation interventions

- 99 • Efforts to be taken to build and maintain a genuine basis for trust
100 between individuals and the social institutions that govern and influence
101 their lives to be part of disinformation interventions

- 102 • Recognition that marginalised groups are both more often the targets of
103 disinformation and more vulnerable to the effects of disinformation, and
104 for addressing marginalisation and seeking the active participation of
105 marginalised groups to be part of any disinformation interventions

- 106 • The development of media literacy education to increase understanding of
107 what disinformation is, how it is spread, how to spot it, and how to talk
108 about it with others, with a particular focus on social media