



European Digital Media Observatory

DISINFORMATION ABOUT ISRAEL/HAMAS CONFLICT FLOODED THE EU IN OCTOBER

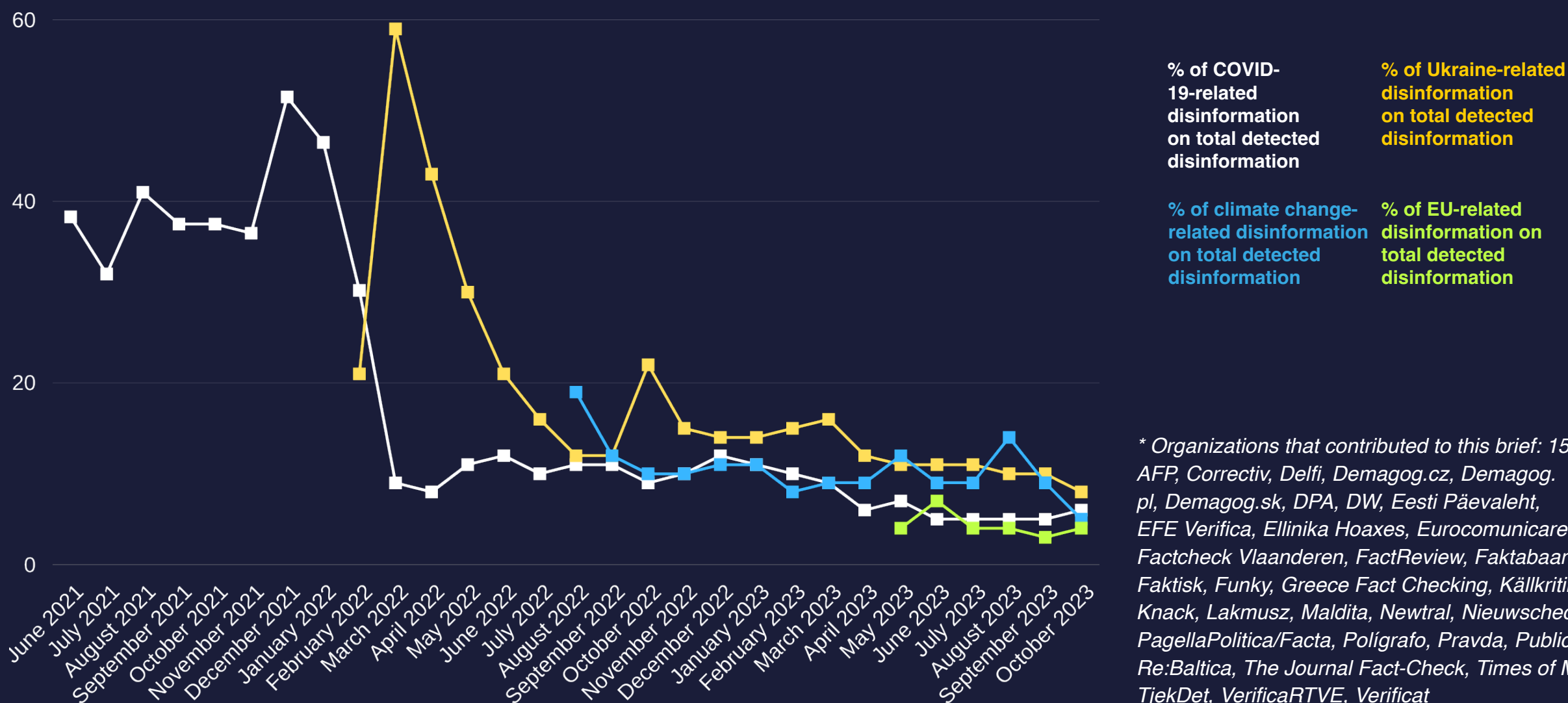
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DISINFORMATION ABOUT THE SITUATION IN ISRAEL AND PALESTINE IN OCTOBER REACHES THE HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL DETECTED DISINFORMATION FOR A SINGLE TOPIC IN THE PAST 18 MONTHS

The 35 organizations* part of the EDMO fact-checking network that contributed to this brief published a total of 1.576 fact-checking articles in October 2023.

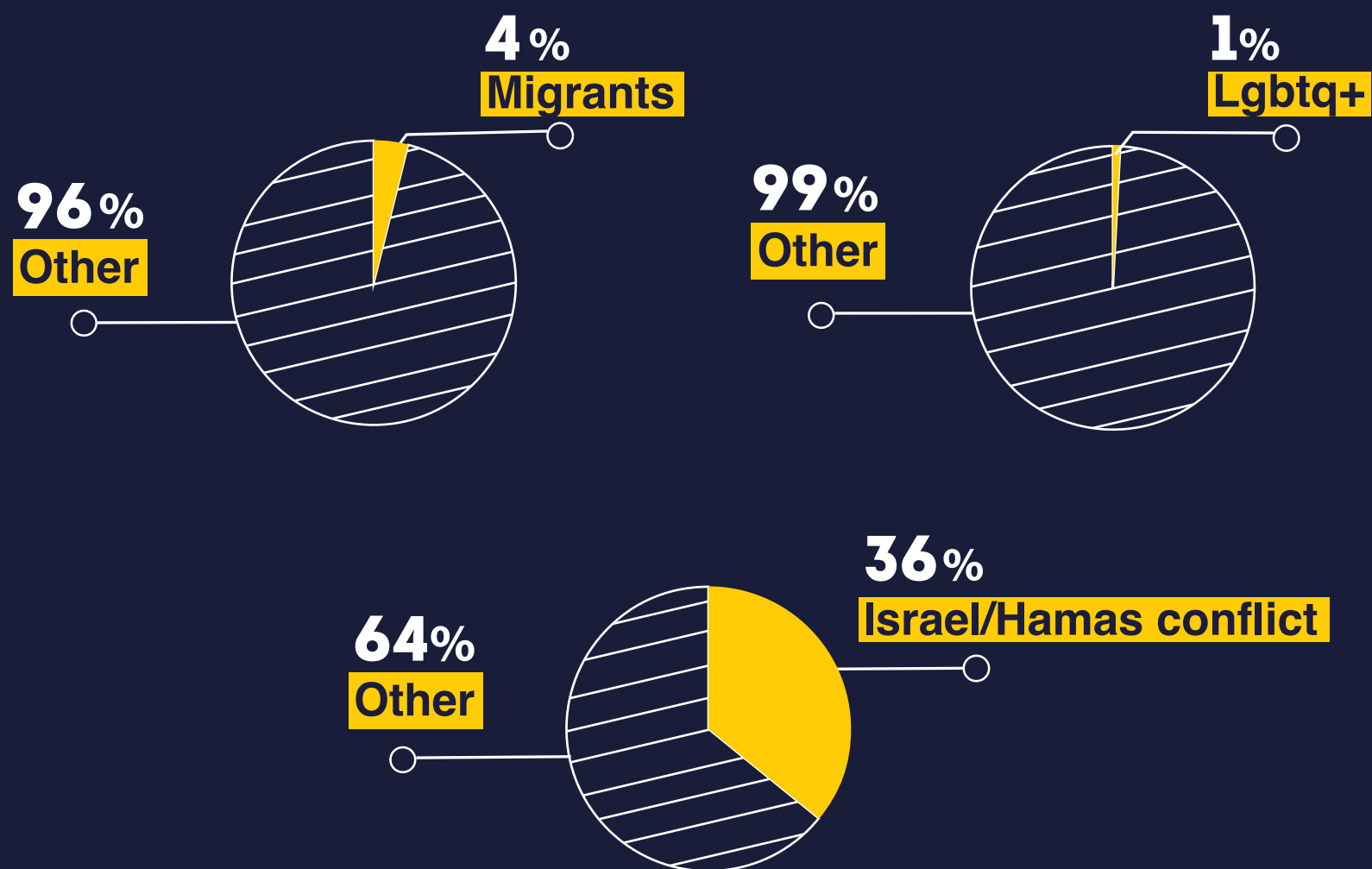
Out of these articles, 121 (8%) focused on Ukraine-related disinformation; 102 (6%) on COVID-19-related disinformation; 83 (5%) on climate change-related disinformation; and 59 (4%) on disinformation related to the EU.



* Organizations that contributed to this brief: 15min, AFP, Correctiv, Delfi, Demagog.cz, Demagog.pl, Demagog.sk, DPA, DW, Eesti Päevaleht, EFE Verifica, Ellinika Hoaxes, Eurocomunicare, Factcheck Vlaanderen, FactReview, Faktabaari, Faktisk, Funky, Greece Fact Checking, Kállkritikbyrin, Knack, Lakmusz, Maldita, Newtral, Nieuwscheckers, PagellaPolitica/Facta, Polígrafo, Pravda, Publico, Re:Baltica, The Journal Fact-Check, Times of Malta, TjekDet, VerificaRTVE, Verificat

Starting this month EDMO begun to monitor the percentages of three other topics: lgbtq+-related disinformation (18 articles out of the 1.576 total, 1%), migrants-related disinformation (61 articles out of the 1.576 total, 4%) and disinformation related to the war between Israel and Hamas (573 articles out of the 1.576 total, 36%).

The disinformation about the conflict in Israel and Palestine is by far the biggest disinformation phenomenon in October, and the relative percentage of the total detected disinformation is the highest for a single topic since April 2022, when Ukraine-related disinformation was 43% of the total.



DISINFORMATION ON THE ISRAEL/HAMAS CONFLICT

A huge wave of disinformation related to the conflict between Israel and Hamas pushed many different narratives in the public debate, as highlighted by an EDMO's preliminary analysis of the phenomenon. One of the main disinformation narratives on this topic used false stories to justify Hamas' actions alleging war crimes by Israel, for example the alleged bombing of a church in Gaza or the use of phosphorus bombs.

Other relevant narratives focused on dehumanizing terrorists (using false stories that exaggerated the already horrific actions of Hamas militias) and overrepresenting support for Hamas and its military achievements. Many other false messages attacked those who called on Israel to respect human rights, accusing them of anti-semitism, or those who provided solidarity and aid to Palestinian civilians, accusing them of supporting the terrorists.

Later in October, other disinformation narratives spread throughout Europe, claiming that the conflict and its brutalities were staged (eg. crisis actors/Pallywood conspiracy theories) or on the contrary that the war was escalating, with alleged declarations of war by neighboring countries, fabricated statements and actions by political actors, and alleged massive - and sometimes violent - pro-Palestinian demonstrations. The situation in the Middle East has also been exploited by disinformers to aggravate the terror alert in some EU countries or to spread hatred against migrants.

The main disinformation technique detected was the use of old images and videos, captioned in a misleading way, to induce the impression of being related to current events. AI-generated images were detected sometimes, but - until now - the volume is not particularly relevant.



OTHER RELEVANT NARRATIVES



Even if the relative percentage of the total detected disinformation is relatively low, disinformation about migrants has been particularly widespread in some specific countries, such as Germany and Spain. Various false claims, even by politicians, describe them as trying to overthrow the established order and attacking police officers. They are often portrayed as trying to impose their religion or way of life. In line with the findings of a recent Edmo investigation, they are also described as an excessive cost to their host countries.



In Slovakia and Poland, where parliamentary elections were held on September 30 and October 15, respectively, most of the disinformation concerned the voting round and the electoral process itself. In Slovakia, it was falsely claimed after the election that some of the elected parties had not received the required number of votes to enter parliament. In Poland, some false stories suggested strange army operations on election day, that some voters were forced to vote for certain parties, and that masses of Ukrainian refugees would soon become voters. These election campaigns have been impacted by AI-generated disinformation, like we reported also in the previous brief for Slovakia, but like it was already said about the Israel/Hamas war, the volume of this kind of disinformation is for now relatively small.



In addition to the usual presence of conspiracy theories and denialism, climate change-related disinformation has focused on discrediting renewable energy sources. In the Scandinavian countries in particular, false stories have claimed that wind farms release microplastics or poison livestock.

THE FIVE FALSE STORIES WITH THE WIDEST CIRCULATION IN THE EU IN OCTOBER, BASED ON THE FACT-CHECKERS' REPORTS, WERE:



- Old images and videos re-captioned to portray current Israel’s violence against civilians in Gaza (eg. Syrian victims passed off as Palestinians etc.)
- “Crisis actors” interpreting Palestinian victims of Israel violence in Gaza (“Pallywood”)
- ▲ A video of children in a cage, allegedly kidnapped by Hamas on the 7 October attack
- ◆ Doctored or mis-captioned images to exaggerate support for Palestine from all over the world (eg. flag on monuments / flag in stadium / huge demonstrations etc.)
- ★ BBC allegedly said that Ukraine sent weapons to Hamas

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT VERIFIED DISINFORMATION STORIES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL:



The EU sanctions member States that do not accept migrants



French media reported that Ukrainian refugees are responsible for the bedbug epidemic in France



Several people have been hospitalized after being in contact with poisoned CDs of the Koran that were sent via mail



METHODOLOGY

The information contained in this brief was collected via a questionnaire sent to the fact-checking organizations that are part of the EDMO fact-checking network.

Reference period: 1-31 October 2023. Number of respondents: 35.
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