

**D9. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM
THE HIGH LEVEL EXPERTS -
LITHUANIA**



**THIS DELIVERABLE HAS BEEN REALISED WITH THE
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Summary of Expert Insights

First and foremost, it should be noted that according to the provisions of the Republic of Lithuania's Law on Public Information, the dissemination of disinformation and information that defames, insults, diminishes the dignity, and honour of a person is prohibited in the country.

Public information outlets are prohibited from publishing information that spreads disinformation, promotes war propaganda, incites violence, violates the sovereignty of the Republic of Lithuania – altering its constitutional order, encroaching upon its independence, or violating its territorial integrity.

The oversight of these provisions in Lithuania, among other institutions, falls under the purview of the Office of the Journalistic Ethics Inspector. The law outlines conditions and procedures for suspending, terminating, and removing access to public information for information producers and disseminators which do not obey the law. This measure is enforced when the Journalistic Ethics Inspector, either on their own initiative or upon receiving information from a national security or other competent authority, determines that an information producer and/or disseminator is disseminating prohibited information that harms or poses a threat to public security, including national security and defence. In this case, the Inspector has the right to appeal to the Vilnius Regional Administrative Court for the suspension of the activities of the public information producer and/or disseminator.

However, the head of the Journalistic Ethics Inspectorate has drawn particular attention to the algorithms and editorial policies governing the activities of social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and network X. It is emphasized that the declared and actual policies of social media platform administrators regarding the spread of disinformation raise at least some justified concerns regarding the effectiveness and fair application of real measures. The persistent issue of fake accounts, websites, and links (e.g., bots, clones) remains relevant, and with the advent of artificial intelligence, this poses an even greater threat.

A separate question examined the different communication styles and information perception among various generations. Experts provided insights on how to find common ground. Attention was drawn to the peculiarities of generational formation, their values, compatibility, and contradictions, such as economic interests versus environmental concerns, individual rights versus the greater good of society. However, experts identified certain attitudes that reveal cognitive traps. Therefore, values like fairness, a sense of justice, and similar principles that unite people of different generations were highlighted.

Special attention was dedicated to the tools for debunking disinformation and their operational possibilities. The effectiveness of these tools is often costly and relatively slow compared to the mechanisms of propaganda and disinformation. Nonetheless, they are crucial instruments for journalists and other decision-making institutions. One of the challenges in countering disinformation is the methodology of social media platforms.

For just a few hundred dollars or euros, it is possible to purchase a dissemination service that can reach tens of thousands of people in a very short time and spread falsehoods to specific target audiences. There is also the phenomenon where fake or unscrupulous journalists disseminate misinformation, often operating under false identities. Therefore, debunking disinformation tools are of utmost importance to both the experts of the Debunk project and journalists alike.

At the expert meeting, a separate topic was highlighted: journalists' readiness to compete with the disinformation industry and its expansion. The business model that sustained the media for decades is crumbling in many countries. Rapid technological changes have opened up new and exciting possibilities for journalism, but they also pose a significant threat to jobs, working conditions, and the quality of journalism. Professions that were once well-paid and secure are increasingly being replaced by precarious work with low wages, leading many to leave this profession. This is particularly painful for local media and journalism aimed at small community groups (national communities).

Major news platforms like Facebook and Google generate billions in profits but pay minimal taxes and do not create any original news content necessary to inform the audience. The goal of journalism could be seen as providing citizens with the information they need to make the best possible decisions about their lives, communities, societies, and governments. Journalists play a crucial role in seeking the truth and reporting it to the public. In the era of digital news, a media revolution is underway, and journalism must increasingly reflect the interests of the audience rather than advertisers, interest groups, or powerful players. It was emphasized that if a sustainable and disinformation-resistant society is to be created, journalism must move in that direction too. It is important for all journalists and the media to build a sustainable future for journalism while upholding key principles: editorial freedom, independence, the public interest, and ethical content.

Whether a journalist is reporting on sports events, entertainment news, stock markets, or current events, they have a collective responsibility to adhere to the code of ethics to avoid conflicts of interest that could compromise integrity or impartiality. The role of quality journalism is increasing, even though it may not always enjoy a large audience. Fake news often affects people's perception of reality and can influence everything from election results to climate change initiatives. Journalists can and must help the public navigate the complex and ever-changing news landscape by providing truth and ethical reporting, shaping the agenda, and informing the public.

However, perhaps the most significant issue and challenge recognized at the expert meeting are not political, economic, or demographic challenges facing journalism or the professional media. Even the use of the disinformation industry by authoritarian and dictatorial regimes against democratic societies could be a minimal problem if not for the dominance of human nature and personal interests and desires over shared values.

Therefore, in this aspect, both the aspirations and values dominant among young people (up to 30 years old) and individuals with significant life experience (from 60 years old) were evaluated.

According to the experts, a considerable part of the media and public figures today only partially fulfill their functions and often cater more to immediate societal needs than long-term sustainable goals. On the other hand, competition between the advertising and public relations industries, state institutions, and political forces for influence has led to the dominance of advertising content principles over public discussions on the most important topics and sustainable problem-solving.

Recommendations

Summarizing the insights of all the experts and the proposed directions for action, the following guidelines were provided:

- Legal assessment and prevention tools for disinformation should be improved, considering technological advancements and emerging threats. However, these tools should not be the sole focus of combating disinformation in individual countries, as international law and agreements are not yet synchronized and uniformly applied.
- Attention to mass audiences and reaching them for the purpose of garnering attention or advertising orders should not dominate or become the sole priority for politicians, the media or journalism community, or other societal actors. Instead, focus and the search for dialogue forms should be directed towards socially, linguistically, geographically, or otherwise marginalized audiences. Different audiences should not be isolated in informational ghettos, and common decision-making platforms should become the norm.
- Media literacy, debunking disinformation, or information literacy programs should transition from pilot or experimental projects to integral parts of the education system and lifelong learning programs, reflecting the needs and specificities of the audience.
- State public information policies should provide effective mechanisms for regulating local or niche media activities that cater to special needs and distribute state financial support for adapting to market changes, whether technological or otherwise. Particular attention should be given to relatively small social or linguistic groups and audiences.
- Academic research on social processes within academic communities and NGO projects should seek new interactions with media outlets. However, public policy and the democratic electoral process, ensuring the inclusion of society in discussions of the most important topics and issues, become even more critical.