BECID

YEAR 2 REPORT

December 2023 - 2024

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Introduction

The name **Baltic Engagement Centre for Combating Information Disorders** reflects our approach and emphasizes the need for proactive, rather than retroactive interventions and monitoring. Since 2020, we have faced multiple crises, including COVID-19, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Hamas-Israel war, and information operations to manipulate democratic elections throughout the election-ridden year of 2024.

We are happy to announce the preliminary acceptance of BECID's funding for round 2, from June 2025-2028. See *chapter 1.4.* for an overview of the environment in the Baltics in which BECID operates. The significance of false narratives, imposter content, AI-generated material, undetected satire, or strategic foreign manipulation in destabilizing democratic societies is evident. We are dedicated to continuing to offer solutions that mitigate risks and increase societal resilience towards foreign information manipulation and the changing landscape of digital communication culture.

BECID connects four universities (the **University of Tartu** and **Tallinn University** in Estonia, **Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences** in Latvia, and **Vytautas Magnus University** in Lithuania), four independent IFCN-approved fact-checkers (**Delfi EE**, **Delfi LV**, and **Delfi LT**, and **Re:Baltica**), and **the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence**, which consolidates third-sector media literacy organizations. **Vidzeme TV** in Latvia is also engaged as a supporting partner without budget participation. As a regional hub, BECID is one of the *14 EDMO hubs* covering the European Union's (EU) 27 Member States.
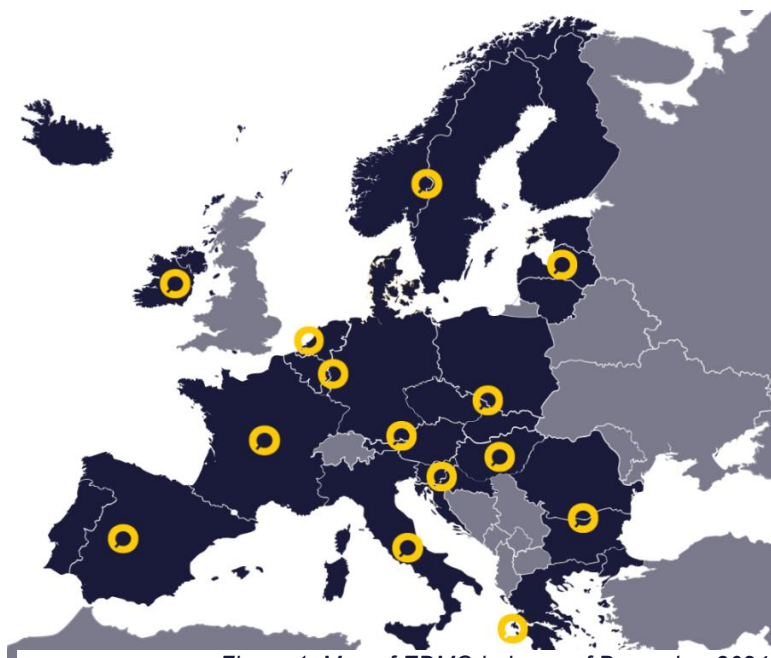
Figure 1. Map of EDMO hubs as of December 2024, source edmo.eu

The World Economic Forum (WEF) highlighted misinformation and disinformation as significant threats in its *2024 Global Risks Report*. At BECID, we recognize the complexity of this issue – one that cannot be entirely solved but can be mitigated through increasing individual and societal resilience against information disorders.

This annual report is the second part of the deliverable for Task 1.4, aiming to provide an overview of BECID's activities from December 2023 to the end of 2024.

1. PROJECT MANAGEMENT, DISSEMINATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

WP1 Overview

The first work package's main objectives were establishing an efficient management structure and continuously coordinating BECID's project, financial, data, and risk management. Six different tasks were developed for this purpose. Two of these tasks – **T1.1** and **T2.2** – were finished in 2023; three – **T1.3** , **T1.4, and T1.5 – were continued in 2024,** and one – **T1.6** – was started in 2024. See the following table for a summary of where we are at.

Task	Start	End	Status
T1.1 Establish management structure, workflows, and internal communications	December 2022	November 2023	Completed
T1.2 Initiation of monitoring of quality assurance and data management	December 2022	September 2023	Completed
T1.3 Administrative and financial coordination	December 2022	May 2025	Ongoing
T1.4 Dissemination of Project Activities and Results	December 2022	May 2025	Ongoing
T1.5 Cooperation with EDMOs and National Authorities	March 2023	May 2025	Ongoing
T1.6 Strategize for Independence and Sustainability of BECID	February 2024	May 2025	Ongoing

This chapter briefly overviews activities for the four ongoing tasks in WP1, divided into thematic subchapters.

1.1. Administrative and Financial Coordination

During the second year (Months 13-24 or December 2023-2024) of BECID, the University of Tartu has managed the administrative and financial coordination tasks as effectively as possible, supporting partners mostly in ensuring smooth operation and compliance with funder guidelines. As coordinator, communication with back offices of all organizations when necessary, as well as being the link between our Project Officer in HADEA and the other consortium members, is, of course, expected from UTARTU. This falls in the hands of **the Project Management Team (PMT)** of UTARTU (see Figure 1 below).

Project Coordinator (PC) Maia Klaassen is responsible for smoothly transferring information between consortium members, national stakeholders, the EDMO network, and DG Connect and representing BECID in any way, shape, or form necessary (see more in *Chapter 1.3.1*). She heads the **Management Committee (MC),** the main decision-making body of the project, adjourning to discuss and manage administrative issues that need to be addressed on the consortium level. PC also works with the Project Manager to prepare project reports and represents the hub at national and international events. **Prof. Andra Siibak**, BECID's **Principal Investigator (PI)**, is responsible for the content outcomes of BECID and ensures all results and studies are evidence-based, conducted using scientific methods, and replicable. She is also accountable for adjourning the **Advisory Board (AB),** which gives annual feedback on published outcomes, outlines strategic goals for the future, and provides guidance based on performance indicators.

Additionally, BECID's **Financial Manager (FM), Regina Lapp**, and **Project Manager (PM), Lilian Ariva**, regularly communicate with all nine partners to ensure that spending complies with funder rules and regulations. That could mean guiding partners on managing budgets and preparing timesheets, giving feedback on project progress monitoring, and providing assistance when unresponsiveness hindered the progress in pan-Baltic tasks.
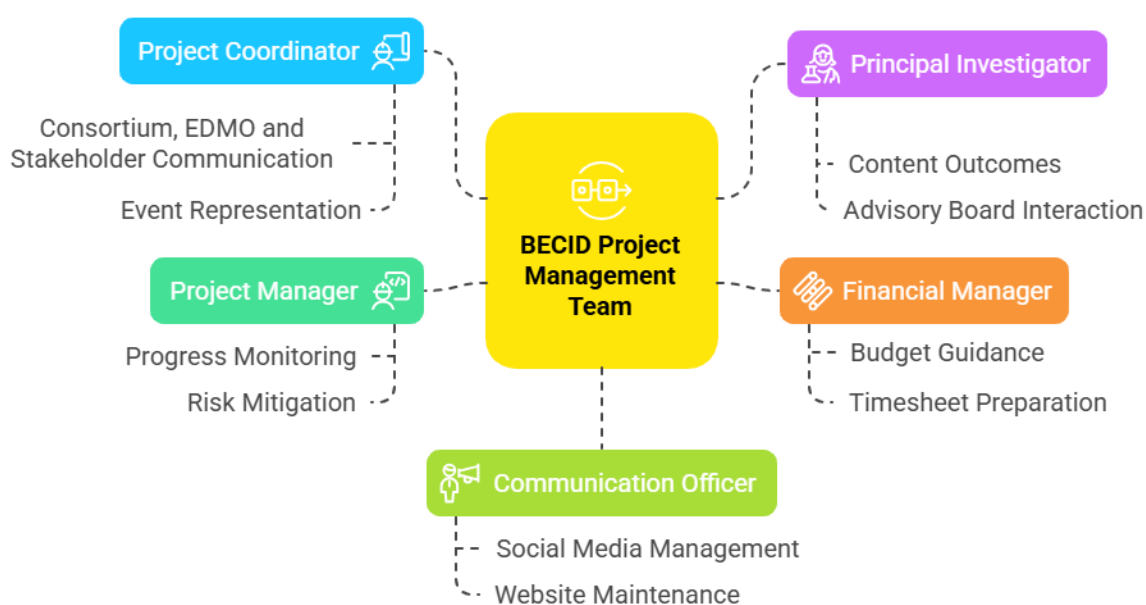

Figure 1 - BECID's PMT Structure and Roles

Not all nine partners have in-house project management or book-keeping departments, so financial coordination requires more hours and is separate from the PM. The PM is responsible for the technical side of project progression, monitoring deadlines, risks,

mitigation techniques, quality, and impact with the PI, communicating directly with Task Leads (TL) and Work Package Leads (WPL) from various organizations in the consortium. Finally, the **Communication Officer (CO), Annaliisa Post,** facilitates effective communication inside and outside the hub, taking care of social media accounts and the website and e-mail channels.

1.2. Quality Assurance Updates

As for Quality Assurance, two new events guided our way in 2024 (in addition to the already published Quality Assurance and Data Management plan). First, in May 2024, BECID published *the Recommended Code of Conduct and Ethics & Common Principles for Researching and Monitoring Fact-checking*, another significant move closer to the standardization of the work done in the Baltics. The report is designed for various audiences: for fact-checkers, it offers guiding questions and principles to inform their work. Researchers can gain insights into evaluating fact-checking initiatives within the Baltic states and using fact-checks to archive false narratives in the region at a specific time or topic (all EDMO fact-checks are flagged with categories). Lastly, the report can inform the general public about the fundamental aspects of the BECID. Based on the work done in BECID, we hope this will be a step forward in providing a shared framework for further work.

Second, not simply in and for the Baltics, but done in collaboration with the EDMO MIL Council (previously the Media Literacy Standards and Best Practices Working Group) and endorsed by stakeholders in most member states, the outcome of months of work *- EDMO Guidelines for Effective Media Literacy Initiatives* - has been published. By raising standards, EDMO means to empower stakeholders with a practical resource offering structured principles and recommendations for practitioners. Rather than imposing strict regulations, this flexible framework is adaptable to diverse contexts and stakeholders. The guidelines emphasize tangible outcomes and impact, moving beyond mere activity delivery to measurable and meaningful results, and are organized around twelve core principles, categorized into three phases of a media literacy initiative: development, delivery, and review.

This structure provides a comprehensive framework for the entire lifecycle of a media literacy project. Designed for a broad range of stakeholders, including civil society organizations, educators, policymakers, and media and technology professionals, the guidelines act as a practical checklist to **guide developing, delivering, and reviewing media literacy initiatives**. Recognizing the dynamic nature of the media landscape, EDMO conducts an annual review of these guidelines to ensure their relevance and effectiveness.

Additionally, EDMO encourages the sharing of initiatives and resources that demonstrate the application of these principles, fostering a collaborative environment for the exchange of best practices and the advancement of media literacy standards across Europe (and providing an opportunity to all practitioners inside our outside the EDMO network, to show off our best work, to be frank).

Overall, our Quality Assurance and Data Management framework was set in T1.2, connected to D1.2, completed by M4, and updated after the midterm review. We aim to continue working on shared guidelines and principles to produce quality work over quantity. To balance that with the context of the attention economy remains the challenge.

1.3. Dissemination of Project Activities and Results

For our first year, we aimed to get name recognition in the region – not just for ourselves but for BECID as a whole and team. In the second year, we continued with the aim of being recognized as a trustworthy organization of experts whose name is known to people. We have been actively seeking opportunities to introduce our results via on-demand lectures, workshops, news, and social media. The dissemination of the project's activities and results through content creation and event organization (**T1.4**) has been successful, but not even in all countries and among all consortium members.

From the beginning of December 2023 until the end of December 2024, we appeared in Baltic news media as experts 40 times (none paid, obviously), organized more than 150 training sessions for almost 5000 people, and participated in 140 events organized by relevant stakeholders to disseminate our results and present BECID and EDMO as a whole.

Additionally, our website *becid.eu* serves as a backstage area for project partners to exchange information, in addition to serving the public. Since BECID is one of 14 regional EDMO centers, we inform our international colleagues and partners in the EDMO network of our activities through the TrulyMedia platform, designed for European information resilience experts. Most of the inputs are visible to the public, allowing further private discussions. However, these options remain underused by the 71 people currently in BECID.

1.3.1. Conference, Seminar and Workshop Facilitation and Participation by BECID

A foundation of our principles for disseminating results from BECID and others in the EDMO network is to **involve BECID in small ways in all of our expert work**, even if only by using our branded PowerPoint and sharing one or two tasks or outcomes of the project at the end of guest lectures, keynotes, and workshops on demand. Consistently talking about our work together helps fulfill our duty to disseminate the results of work done in our hub and the rest of the EDMO network. We also position ourselves as on-demand experts for journalists, policymakers, and regional diplomats. In other words, we ensure we do not appear to be experts in an ivory tower but continuously share new initiatives and findings within our networks.

December (2023)

- On December 1st, training for Kuressaare Hospital employees - "Uhhuu in Healthcare: Why, Who, How, and What to Do?" (by Maria Murumaa-Mengel).
- On December 6th, lecture on "Modern Media World: Risks, Opportunities, and Impact" at Senior University (by Inger Klesment).
- On December 6th, discussion on media literacy and Russian disinformation at an in-reach event organized by the Lithuanian Embassy in Italy and Luiss University (by Maia Klaassen).
- On December 7th, guest lecture for Luiss University's journalism and communication master's students - "The Disinfo Cake: Combatting Disinfo in Estonia" (by Maia Klaassen).
- On December 7th, a webinar by the University of Tartu's social sciences department - "Researchers on Social Media" (by Maria Murumaa-Mengel).
- On December 7th, training for teachers at Tallinn Technical Gymnasium - "Game-Based Digital and Media Literacy Education in Primary School" (by Inger Klesment).
- On December 15th, participation in MLA4MedLit, Standards and Best Practices organizing team and panel discussion (by Maia Klaassen).
- On December 19th, lecture/discussion for parents at Viljandi Family Nest - "Children in the Digital World" (by Inger Klesment).
- On December 22nd, guest lecture for Luiss University's journalism and communication master's students - "AI and the Ethics of it All" (by Maia Klaassen).

January (2024)

- On January 8th, Maria Murumaa-Mengel presented a lecture to Tartu Private School teachers on "AI in Education: Tool/Mindset and Risk/Opportunity," covering the digital skills needed in the era of artificial intelligence and how to use LLM tools for daily tasks.
- On January 10th, Maia Klaassen gave a lecture on combating information disorders with the support of media literacy as part of the University for Seniors series in Riisipere.
- On January 12th, as part of the Estonian Defense Forces' basic communication training, Maria Murumaa-Mengel delivered seminars on "Social Media and Information Resilience" to communication specialists.
- January 15th marked the start of Inger Klesment's (UT) project funded by the Government Office of Estonia: media and digital literacy games for 5–7-year-olds in all kindergartens in Viljandi.
- On January 17 and 18, Delfi Estonia fact-checkers Marta Vunš and Kaili Malts conducted two e-classes for more than 600 students in Estonia on ways to recognize disinformation on social media. The classes are available online as educational material.
- On January 18th, Maria Murumaa-Mengel conducted a poster presentation at the UT conference "From Teacher to Teacher," introducing courses developed at UT Institute

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of Social Studies focusing on media literacy and digital activism: "Media in the Era of Disinformation" and "Microinterventions in Media and Information Literacies."

- On January 18th, Maia Klaassen and Maria Murumaa-Mengel introduced the English-language MA program "Disinformation and Societal Resilience" during the UT Virtual Open Day.
- On January 18th, Gretel Juhansoo (UT) conducted a workshop on online conspiracy theories at Miina Härma Gymnasium.
- On January 22nd, Gretel Juhansoo and Kaarel Lott (UT) conducted a media literacy workshop at Pirita Gymnasium of Economics.
- On January 23rd, Inger Klesment and Gretel Juhansoo hosted an online seminar for Maltese teachers, introducing games for teaching media and digital literacy to kindergarten and primary school children.
- On January 25th, Inger Klesment led training on gamifying media literacy education at Tallinn Technical Gymnasium.

February (2024)

- Delfi Estonia fact-checker Kaili Malts took part in the launch event of the Civic Resilience Initiative tool, where she discussed how to combat disinformation in the Baltics.
- On 15.02 and 27.02, Inger Klesment (UT) conducted trainings in gamifying media education for Tallinn Technical Gymnasium and Paide Hillar Hanssoo school teachers.
- On February 15, Maia Klaassen delivered a presentation titled "How to Stay Healthy in the Information Maze?" at the Document Managers Association conference.
- On February 18, Maia Klaassen participated in a panel discussion and presented the keynote "AI, Attention Economy, and the 24/7 News Cycle: The Risks and Rewards of Journalism in 2024" at the Winter School organized by HIKMA.
- On February 22, Maia Klaassen delivered a guest lecture titled "How to not only survive but thrive in the information maze?" to ARTUN students.
- On February 22, Gretel Juhansoo and Inger Klesment delivered a public lecture and seminar titled "Advancing the digital media literacies of the youth: pracademic approaches" at the University of Tartu. You can read the summary *here*.
- On February 22, Maia Klaassen conducted an online class titled *"AI: Humanity's Doom or Trustworthy Assistant."*
- On February 21–22, Maria Murumaa-Mengel led a training for employees of the Social Insurance Board addressing technology-mediated violence.
- On February 26, Jānis Buholcs (ViA) represented BECID at the *EDMO Scientific Conference* (the University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands), where he presented the paper "The state of research on fact-checking."

March (2024)

- On March 1st, representatives from BECID, Rimgailė Kasparaitė, and Patricija Lenčiauskienė, presented the "Media Walkshop" method – developed by BECID

researcher Auksė Balčytienė – at the digital and media literacy conference in Brussels. Attendees lauded its simplicity and inclusivity, which are valuable for busy educators. *Read more*.

- On March 6th, Gretel Juhansoo (UT) conducted a workshop on spreading conspiracy theories on social media at Miina Härma Gymnasium.
- On March 6th, Maria Murumaa-Mengel (UT) lectured Pärnu College students on the logic and strategies of influencers.
- On March 7th, Inger Klesment (UT) introduced possibilities to prevent cyberbullying through games at the cyberbullying conference organized by KIVA.
- On March 12th, executive director and editor of Re:Baltica Sanita Jemberga held a workshop titled "How to investigate violation of sanctions?" for journalists and other media professionals at Stockholm School of Economics in Riga.
- On March 14th, Evita Puriņa, head of Re:Baltica's fact-checking team Re:Check, conducted a workshop on emerging disinformation trends for Latvian NGO experts. This workshop is part of a new initiative under the Digital Activism Program, led by BCME, to combat disinformation in Central and Eastern Europe.
- Co-founder and editor of Re:Baltica Inga Spriņģe held three workshops on media literacy and recent disinformation trends for schoolteachers and senior citizens.
- On March 14th, Maria Murumaa-Mengel led a training day on information resilience and critical information consumption for school leaders in Tartu and Tartu County.
- On March 18th, Inger Klesment conducted a training for parents of students at Tartu Lutheran Peter's School on children's media usage.
- On March 21st, Maria Murumaa-Mengel organized the first meeting of Estonian stakeholders addressing (de)radicalization. Maia Klaassen, Inger Klesment, and Gretel Juhansoo also represented BECID.
- On March 22nd and 27th, Maria Murumaa-Mengel conducted training sessions on the uses and risks of AI, first at the University for the Elderly in Pärnu and on the 27th for Tartu Private School students' parents.

April (2024)

- On April 2nd, BECID representatives in Lithuania Auksė Balčytienė and Kristina Juraitė had trainings for teachers.
- Evita Puriņa, head of Re:Baltica's fact-checking team Re:Check, joined a networking event hosted by Lithuanian public broadcaster LRT as part of the EU-funded MediaFit program supporting Ukrainian journalists in combating disinformation.
- On April 5th, Inger Klesment and Maria Murumaa-Mengel participated in Telia's Strategy Day, discussing the support children and young people require online.
- On April 5th, Maria Murumaa-Mengel conducted a training session for female leaders of the Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, centered around building a personal brand on social media.
- On April 8, Jānis Buholcs and Evita Puriņa represented BECID in a meeting with Věra Jourová, European Commission Vice-President for Values and Transparency, during

her Riga visit. Vice-President Jourová discussed Latvian media and fighting disinformation.

- Evita Puriņa held a workshop for Latvian NGO experts on fact-checking political communication of European Parliament candidates before the EU elections.
- Co-founder and editor of Re:Baltica Inga Spriņģe held a workshop on media literacy and recent disinformation trends for the librarians of Gulbene municipality.
- On April 12th and 13th, Maia Klaassen delivered a keynote speech and facilitated a workshop in partnership with the German Baltic Future Foundation, focusing on AI literacy and ethical applications.
- On April 17th, Maria Murumaa-Mengel joined the Talent to Tartu event, addressing the question of whether all professionals should be active on social media.
- On April 18th, Maia Klaassen conducted a lecture and workshop at Tallinn Laagna Gymnasium, focusing on the risks and opportunities of AI.
- On April 23rd, BCME Executive Director Gunta Sloga attended Google's Fighting Misinformation Online event in Warsaw. The conference addressed combating disinformation before European Parliament elections, with experts from Central and Eastern Europe, including representatives from other EDMO hubs. Gunta Sloga led a panel on cross-sectoral cooperation in the fight against disinformation.
- On April 24, Gunta Sloga met with Laure Delmoly, international project manager of CLEMI, a member of the French EDMO hub. The possible future cooperation on disinformation resilience and best media and information literacy practices was discussed.
- On April 26th, Maia Klaassen presented a brief overview and joined a panel discussion on "AI opportunities for youth" at the Pop-Up Congress organized by the German Baltic Future Foundation.
- On April 30th, Gretel Juhansoo moderated a debate titled "The TikTok Effect" as part of Tartu Student Days.
- On April 30th, Maria Murumaa-Mengel and Maia Klaassen led a seminar at Tartu School Boards, focusing on "How to distinguish between fake news and real news? Basic principles of information verification."

May (2024)

- On May 2nd, Maria Murumaa-Mengel (UT) conducted a training session on "Social Media Platforms and Micro-Communities in the Context of Internal Communication Information Resilience" for *koolitusturg.ee*.
- On May 6, professor Auksė Balčytienė attended the scientific and practical symposium "Intersections of Political Communication: Society, Media, Politics," held in the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, where Lithuanian media and political experts discussed how to address the challenges of indifference, polarization and digital divide in society.
- On May 7th, Maria Murumaa-Mengel gave a *video lecture on UTTV* for Tartu University's Science School about the flood of misinformation accompanying the European Parliament elections. You can find supporting worksheets *here* (EE, which can be translated to EN).

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- On May 9th, Maria Murumaa-Mengel held an online training session for the Chamber of Commerce and Industry members titled "Micro-Communities Within a Company."
- On May 9th, the Maaleht Elderly Festival was held at the Estonian National Museum. Inger Klesment, Maria Murumaa-Mengel, and Gretel Juhansoo collaborated with Telia to design postcards to raise awareness about online fraud, resulting in entertaining outcomes. You can find numerous examples of the postcards *here* and the Canva document *here*.
- On May 17, an editor of 'Delfi' Lithuania fact-checking initiative 'Melo Detektorius' (read more from the Varia section), Aistė Meidutė participated in the international EDMO fact-checking conference 'Eu And Disinformation: Last Checkpoint Before The Vote,' where partners reviewed EDMO's efforts to combat misinformation before the EU election.
- On May 22nd, participants from the Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry's women's leadership acceleration program visited the University of Tartu, where Maria Murumaa-Mengel discussed professional use of social media and influencer culture.
- On May 23rd, Maria Murumaa-Mengel gave a public lecture for SALTO Participation and Information titled *"Stay Sharp During Elections – How Cognitive Biases and Media Influence Our Decisions"* (EN).
- Lithuanian 'Delfi's' fact-checking initiative 'Melo Detektorius' is the first Baltic initiative to join YouTube's pilot fact-checking program. On May 24, editor Aistė Meidutė attended a YouTube workshop in Paris, where participants learned about YouTube's functions, met journalist Charles Villa, and discussed fact-checking content creation and promotion.
- In May, the representative of BECID in Lithuania, Auksė Balčytienė (VMU), participated in the scientific conference organized by the Faculty of Communications of Vilnius University.

June (2024)

- On June 3, Gunta Sloga (BCME) participated in the public discussion "Threats to democracy on the eve of the European Parliament elections."
- On June 5, Maia Klaassen (UT) welcomed visitors from the Heritage Foundation, Chatham House, Queen Mary University of London, El Pais, DGAP's Research Institute, Le Figaro, Defence One, and La Stampa as part of a delegation invited and hosted by the Estonian Ministry of Defence.
- On June 8, Gretel Juhansoo (UT) carried out activities about digital media competencies at Tabivere Basic School's family day.
- On June 10, Maia Klaassen, Maria Murumaa-Mengel, and Gretel Juhansoo (UT) welcomed visitors from the Bulgarian-Romanian Observatory of Digital Media, *BROD*, in the form of Andy Stoycheff and Milena Koleva-Zvancharova.
- On June 10, Maria Murumaa-Mengel, Maia Klaassen, and Inger Klesment (UT) conducted a training on information disorders, checking information, and children's digital world at Tartu Catholic School.

- On June 12-17, Jānis Buholcs (ViA) participated in the 29th conference of the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies (AABS) in New Haven, U.S., with a paper "Approaches to ambiguity among Latvian fact-checkers".
- On June 13, Maia Klaassen (UT) conducted a workshop on resolving conflicts arising from false information for elementary school teachers.
- On June 13, Gretel Juhansoo (UT) gave a presentation "TikToki maja: Kuidas kutseharidus saab toetada ühiskondliku mõjuga projektide elluviimist" [TikTok House: How vocational education can support the implementation of projects with social impact?] at Erasmus+ Vocational Education Summer School.
- On June 13, Maria Murumaa-Mengel (UT) gave a presentation, "Research+Teach+Outreach: What do we do to fight the information disorder?" to communication experts from the Police and Border Guard Board and the public sector.
- On June 27, Maria Murumaa-Mengel and Inger Klesment (UT) conducted a training, "The media worlds of children and young people: how the library can help develop media and information competencies," at the summer academy of librarians.

July (2024)

- Evita Puriņa and Inga Spriņģe (Re:Baltica) participated in events organized by SkeptiCafe, a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting critical thinking and science-literacy in Latvia. Evita provided insights into the formation and spread of conspiracy theories, while Inga discussed the interplay between politics, media, and society.
- Journalists from Re:Baltica participated in the annual Conversation Festival Lampa in Cēsis, Latvia. Inese Braže participated in the discussion titled "#Cancel media. If there were no journalists?". Additionally, Evita Puriņa, head of Re:Baltica's fact-checking team Re:Check, joined a debate on misinformation and disinformation in the daily information landscape.
- On July 8–10, Auksė Balčytienė (VMU) attended the 5th International ESS Conference in Lisbon, where she spoke about "(Social) Media consumption and Beliefs in Conspiracy Theories" and shared her insights on the results of a comparative study on media literacy. *Read more*.
- On July 16–19, Maia Klaassen (UT) attended the DCN Global conference. She spoke on the panel on media and information literacy policies and regional challenges.

August (2024)

- On August 6, Gretel Juhansoo (UT) conducted two workshops on the spread of conspiracy theories on social media at an inspiration camp for chemistry teachers.
- On August 8, Maria Murumaa-Mengel (UT) gave a presentation on developing media literacy in history and social studies lessons at the summer school of the Estonian Society of History and Social Studies Teachers.
- On August 14, Inger Klesment (UT) carried out digital security games for the children of the Tartu Toy Musem summer camp.

- On August 22, Maria Murumaa-Mengel (UT) conducted a training on information noise and information verification for school and kindergarten teachers from Kuusalu. On August 26, Maria Murumaa-Mengel and Maia Klaassen (UT) conducted a training on information verification, critical information literacy, and critical information literacy for Tartu VOCO teachers and leaders.
- Sanita Jemberga (Re:Baltica) conducted a workshop for about 30 young lawyers, focusing on journalism work methods and legal aspects.
- Evita Puriņa (Re:Baltica) participated in a hackathon to strengthen NGOs' resistance to disinformation and misinformation.
- Inese Braže (Re:Baltica) spent a week at a camp in Germany, where she lectured Latvian youth worldwide on how to navigate the media, recognize false or misleading information, verify facts, and protect themselves in the digital environment.

September (2024)

- On September 3-4, BECID junior researcher Rimgailė Kasparaitė (VMU) took part in the "Democracy & Digital Citizenship" conference at the University of Southern Denmark, where she presented her dissertation's conceptualization and theoretical analysis of the sources, which served as a basis for further empirical research and also represented the DIGIRES and BECID projects as a successful example of cooperation between different stakeholders in the Baltics, as well as discussed the possibilities of future collaborations with researchers at other European Universities. *Read more*.
- On September 9, Auksė Balčytienė took part in a panel discussion at the International Theatre Festival "Ja Fest," where participants shared their insights on various media work-related issues, including the digital challenges to the profession and the safety of journalists.
- On September 17-20, Maia Klaassen (UTARTU) represented BECID at Advanced Digital State and Cyber Defense Courses.
- On September 24-27, Jānis Buholcs ("Establishing the 'truth': The epistemologies of fact-checkers in Latvia and Estonia"; ViA) and Maria Murumaa-Mengel ("Feeling the "influencer creep": How different professions embed influencers' practices to their work"; UTARTU) represented BECID at the *10th ECREA European communication conference.*
- On September 27, Vidzemes Augstskola offered visitors to play a game about disinformation at the European Researchers' Night at Via.
- On September 30, a special focus group session based on dialogic communication on media performance was held with community members of Kaunas City (organizers: Auksė Balčytienė, Kristina Juraitė).
- On September 30, junior researchers Patricija Lenčiauskienė and Rimgailė Kasparaitė held a workshop called "Media Walkshop" (based on DIGIRES MIL methodology) for Kaunas community members and leaders.
- In September, publications were produced with a special acknowledgment of BECID: Balčytienė, A. (2024). Transforming epistemic communities for a healthier discourse

in today's Europe. Deeds and Days / Darbai Ir Dienos, 79, 37–50. *https://doi.org/10.7220/2335-8769.79.2*; Balčytienė, A., Bocullo, D., & Juraitė, K. (2024). Baltic democracies beyond the EU accession: media as a bearer of democratic culture and means of resilience in navigating uncertainties. Journal of Contemporary European Studies, 1–16. *https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2024.2360030*.

October (2024)

- On October 2 and 16, Maia Klaassen (UTARTU) conducted online seminars for young people. She talked about algorithms and sharing data.
- On October 3 and 4, VMU representatives Auksė Balčytienė, Kristina Juraitė, Rimgailė Kasparaitė, and Patricija Lenčiauskienė attended *the 28th Central European Political Science Association (CEPSA) Conference* "Twenty Years of EU Membership: Lessons Learned, Challenges And Opportunities," organized by Central European Political Science Association in cooperation with Vytautas Magnus University, Faculty of Political Science. Auksė Balčytienė, together with BECID colleagues from Latvia and Estonia Agnese Davidsone, Andra Siibak, and Signe Ivask, presented the report "Lessons Learned from Policy Responses to Disinformation in the Baltic Countries: Looking Beyond Risk-Awareness and Securitization". Kristina Juraitė presented a report, "Promoting Dialogue and Civic Agency amid Digital Disruption: A New Approach to Public Communication Ethics." Patricija Lenčiauskienė presented a report, "Lithuanian Youth's Digital Literacy Skills And Self-Conscious Use Of Information In A Changing Media Landscape." Rimgailė Kasparaitė presented a report "Multistakeholder partnerships in communications policy for digital resilience."
- On October 7, Maria Murumaa-Mengel (UTARTU) gave a lecture on similarities and differences between media generations.
- On October 10, Marta Vunš (fact-checker at Delfi Estonia) participated in a Foundation CR14 gathering, where she presented Delfi Estonia's fact-checking and investigative work, methods, and insights on current propaganda threats in Estonia.
- On October 10, Maria Murumaa-Mengel (UTARTU) conducted a training "Academic support to Information resiliency" for the Ukraine military communication specialists.
- On October 11, Inger Klesment and Maria Murumaa-Mengel (UTARTU) conducted a training on children and youth culture on digital platforms for teachers.
- On October 16, Inger Klesment (UTARTU) conducted training on using AI in event communication with cultural workers.
- On October 16, Patricija Lenčiauskienė participated in the finale of the Researchers Grand Prix organized by the Lithuanian Young Scientists' Association. The contest gathered PhD researchers, who had to present their research in 3 minutes. Patricija has presented her research on Lithuanian youth's digital and media skills.
- On October 17, Maria Murumaa-Mengel (UTARTU) lectured the Ukraine communication and media experts on building societal resilience.
- On October 22, VMU representatives Auksė Balčytienė, Rimgailė Kasparaitė, and Patricija Lenčiauskienė participated in a post-conference webinar in collaboration with the UNESCO MIL Alliance "Developing Digital Literacies in Algorithmic Cultures"

organized by European Communication Research and Education Association. They represented their paper "Enhancing epistemic skills and moral awareness in journalistic decision-making."

- On October 24, Evita Puriņa, head of Re:Baltica's fact-checking section, participated in a discussion on the successes and failures of disinformation prevention and media literacy initiatives at the opening of the 13th Global Media and Information Literacy Week at the State Chancellery of Latvia.
- On October 24, UTARTU representatives took part in the Estonian media education conference in Pärnu. Maria Murumaa-Mengel and Kaarel Lott (UTARTU) conducted a lecture on "When Andrew Tate enters the classroom."
- On October 25, Maria Murumaa-Mengel participated in the Baltic MIL Summit in Tallinn. She conducted a lecture, "Microinterventions as a Tool for Digital Activism."
- On October 26, Gretel Juhansoo (UTARTU) gave a lecture, "How AI has turned disinformation into a trend," at the German-Baltic Conference in Lithuania.
- On October 26, Inger Klesment (UTARTU) traveled to Malta for a week to carry out digital security games at schools and to lecture teachers about teaching digital security.
- On October 29th, the VMU team participated in the discussion, dedicated to MIL week and moderated by BECID junior researcher Patricija Lenčiauskienė, "Is disinformation a companion of our daily life?". During the discussion held in Ąžuolynas library, the participants discussed the daily flow of information surrounding us and whether it contains widespread misinformation. They also discussed the influence of modern technologies on information creation and transmission processes and whether Lithuanian citizens have enough means to develop media and information literacy and critical thinking.
- On October 29 –30, Evita Puriņa attended the EFCSN annual conference and the organization's assembly in Brussels, where fact-checkers from across Europe discussed the challenges of using AI in fact-checking and the difficulties of collaborating with digital platforms.
- On October 30, the Baltic Center for Media Excellence (BCME) hosted the Baltic MIL Day in Riga, Latvia.
- On October 31, Maia Klaassen (UTARTU) gave an e-lesson, "What is the price of brainrot to my privacy?".
- On October 29–31, Delfi Melo Detektorius (Delfi Lie Detectors) participated in the conference "Enhancing Information Resilience and Empowering International Cooperation to Combat Malign Influence," organized by "CRDF Global."
- In October, several workshops or skills laboratories organized by the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence in cooperation with NGO NewEast focused on media and information literacy for the elderly were held in the Latgale region of Latvia, thanks to co-financing from the Society Integration Fund of the Republic of Latvia.
- At the annual OIP conference in Durres, Albania, Aistė Meidutė (Delfi Lithuania) presented her findings on the topic of "Staying Relevant: Growth (and survival)

Strategies for Media. " She presented Delfi's best practices on how traditional digital media and fact-checking can grow and stay relevant in the age of social media.

- At the EFCSN conference in Brussels, Aistė Meidutė (Delfi Lithuania) was moderating a panel discussion, „Prebunking in Practice: Turning Theory into Action". The discussion revolved around how prebunking, an academically proven concept, can be most effectively applied in real life. The session explored the practical implementation of prebunking and examined the relationship and interdependencies between prebunking and debunking.

November (2024)

- On November 4, Gretel Juhansoo (UTARTU) gave an e-lesson, "How are algorithms shaping our experiences on social media?".
- On November 7, Maia Klaassen (UTARTU) gave a lecture, "Artificial intelligence in the context of project writing," at a project writing training.
- On November 8, Auksė Balčytienė took part in a panel discussion focused on enhancing psychological resilience and practical learning through media literacy strategies at an open forum named "Security Code" (Saugumo kodas).
- On November 14, Maria Murumaa-Mengel (UTARTU) participated in a conference organized by the Integration Foundation. She participated in the panel discussion "Discussion: Information space, culture space, values space – how to bridge them in the era of digital bubbles?" and gave a short lecture, "Some bridges should be burnt?"
- On November 14, Gretel Juhansoo (UTARTU) conducted a training on AI for 4th–6th graders of TäheTERA school.
- On November 15, Inger Klesment (UTARTU) gave artificial intelligence training to career and entrepreneurship teachers working in Tartu schools.
- On November 11, Maia Klaassen (UTARTU) gave a lecture, "Information interference, the attention economy, and artificial intelligence," to the participants of the project Talents to Tartu.
- On November 22, Gretel Juhansoo (UTARTU) conducted media and digital literacy training for 6th–9th graders of Rapla Kesklinna School.
- On November 25, Maria Murumaa-Mengel (UTARTU) and Maarja Punak gave an e-lesson," How to stand up to cyberbullies."
- On November 26–17, Annija Petrova (Re:Baltica) participated in the EDMO fact-checking training event in Athens, Greece. Investigative techniques and tools for Telegram, as well as methods for analyzing political ads and building trust while countering disinformation, were among the topics discussed.
- From November 25 to 27, Marta Vunš, a fact-checker at Delfi Estonia, participated in the EDMO Fact-Checking Training Event in Athens.
- On November 28, Maria Murumaa-Mengel (UTARTU) held a seminar, "Ideas for Lessons: possibilities of human intelligence and artificial intelligence," for teachers.
- On November 28, Inger Klesment (UTARTU) gave a lecture, "Will artificial intelligence replace the project writer?" at the information day of the Nordplus program.

- Evita Puriņa (Re:Baltica) gave three lectures and fact-checking workshops to journalism students at Riga Stradiņš University and Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences.
- In November, focused translations and design work are being performed using MIL methodology for teachers. The languages translated are Polish, Ukrainian, Russian, Azerbaijani, Armenian, and Georgian.

December (2024)

- On December 2, Maia Klaassen (UTARTU) presented a keynote at the Platforms, People & Policy Hackathon organized by Media Support titled "Navigating Information Disorders and Increasing Societal Resilience – a Baltic Perspective."
- On December 3, Auksė Balčytienė held a seminar focused on media literacy and digital resilience, titled "Information Disorder and Accountability: What is Our Approach to a Fractured Reality?" for the members of the Association of Distance Learning Providers in Lithuania.
- On December 3, Maria Murumaa-Mengel (UTARTU) participated in a panel discussion at the "Koos tugevamad" conference focused on intimate partner violence.
- On December 6, Inger Klesment (UTARTU) gave an e-lesson, "How can friends teach each digital literacy?".
- On December 6, Maria Murumaa-Mengel (UTARTU) gave a speech at a conference aimed at journalists about intimate partner violence.
- On December 10, Maia Klaassen (UTARTU) conducted a training "How to check expertise?" for teachers.
- On December 14, Gretel Juhansoo (UTARTU) conducted a workshop on artificial intelligence at the student council training day in Tallinn.
- In December, VMU Publishing House released the first media literacy issues-focused monograph in the Lithuanian language, "Artimas tolimas medijų pasaulis: virsmai, ribos ir būdai tai suprasti" (The near-distant realm of media: changes, boundaries, and methods to comprehend it), scientifically composed by Auksė Balčytienė and language editor Kristina Berksun. The book includes publications by various authors representing disciplines of communication science, political science, linguistics, sociology, and technical sciences, including chapters by BECID/DIGIRES members (Darius Amilevičius, Jūratė Ruzaitė, Ignas Kalpokas, Kristina Juraitė, Darius Remeika, Patricija Lenčiauskienė, Auksė Balčytienė).

1.3.2. Dissemination Through News Media

As previously stated, our communication plan and dissemination principles rely on reaching specific and focused audiences rather than posting "Did you know we had a nice event?" notices that have become obsolete. So, we aim our communication with news media carefully: we have a series ongoing in the Estonian cultural newspaper Sirp as a monthly

column, but we are also frequent authors at **Õpetajate Leht** – the only news publication in Estonia directed at teachers.

Additionally, all four of our fact-checking partners publish their fact-checks not only on *BECID's website* and *EDMO's repository* but also on their respective websites, which garner more traffic than the project website ever could. BECID's fact-checkers' reach and other KPIs can be measured at the project's close, whilst the following list is mostly of publications outside of our control and, therefore, has a measurable impact—simply giving back to society.

1. Aarma, K. (2024). Sotsiaalmeedia uurija Maria Murumaa-Mengel: platvormid on disainitud selliseks, et me annaksime neile palju oma aega. *Raadio 2*.
2. Aarma, K. (2024). TÜ digimeediauuringute nooremteadur Kaarel Lott: manfluencerite retoorika lõhestab ühiskonda. *Raadio 2.*
3. Bibikov, B. A. (2024). DigiÄKK: Digi- ja meediapädevuste õpetamine läbi mängu. *Lapsevanema Kool*.
4. Ert, K. & Libe, T. (2024). Maia Klaassen: sotsiaalmeedias tuleb säilitada kriitikameel! *Vikerraadio.*
5. Firehose of Falsehood. (2024). Kako skrajna desnica uporablja tiktok za širjenje laži in zarot. *Oštro.*
6. Helmvee, A. (2024). Kõik, mida teame Nicocado Avocado juhtumist. *Laser Tech.*
7. Himma, M. & Luts, J. (2024). Maia Klaassen: Facebook näitab kasutajale seda, mida algoritm tahab näidata. *Vikerraadio*.
8. Ivask, S., Laak, B., Rats, L. & Suija, A. (2024). Eesti meediapädevus – järgmine Tiigrihüpe või eilsed uudised? *Õhtuleht*.
9. Järvsaar, E. (2024). "Meie täiskasvanutel ei ole piisavalt digi-pädevust, et lapsi õpetada. Ekraanide keelamine ei vii kuhugi, tarkus tuleb koos tarbides*". Pere ja Kodu.*
10. Jemeļjanova, D. Seniori apgūst medijpratību, žurnālisti – digitālās prasmes. *Panorāma.*
11. Kallaste, E. (2024). KUULA | Mida ma saan vanemana teha, et sotsiaalmeedias toimuv minu lapsele halba mõju ei avaldaks? *Lasteabi.*
12. Kilumets, J. (2024). Anonüümsed häbistamise grupid. *Terevisioon*.
13. Klesment, I. (2024). Kuidas kaasata meediahariduses õpilasi? *Õpetajate Leht*.
14. Knees, L. (2024). „Deutschland wird am meisten attackiert". *WirtschaftsWoche*.
15. Kropa-Kaļužnaja, K. (2024). Dezinformācija un faktu pārbaude. TV program "*Zinātne tuvplānā*"
16. Kuku pärastlõuna. (2024). Mitme näoga Eesti. Maria Murumaa-Mengel. Sotsiaalmeedia ja kultuur. *Kuku.*
17. Kuld, M. (2024). Inger Klesmenti mängulisi lahendusi vajavad kogu Euroopa lapsed. *Sakala*.

18.   Kuld, M. (2024). Koolieelikute seas on vaid mõni üksik laps, kes ei tea, mis on Skibidi Toilet või Roblox. *Sakala*.

19.   Lon, A. (2024). NAGU MINI-KEVADTORM! Õppejõud ja tudengid viisid laste meediaõpetuse õue. *Õhtuleht.*

20.   Lott, K. (2024). Kaarel Lott: seksism ja misogüünia levib noorte meeste seas üha enam. TikTokis toimuv on ohtlik. *Eesti Päevaleht*.

21.   LSM. Profesors: Ar bērniem par drošību internetā tiek runāts pārāk maz. *Ģimenes studija* (Latvian Public Media)

22.   Morozova, A., Stānoiu, I., Stefankova, E., Slerka, J., Malts, K., Blum, P. & Zubor, Z. (2024). How the far-right used TikTok to spread lies and conspiracies. *VSquare*.

23.   Mõttus, M. (2024). Digilõhe*. Siin me oleme*.

24.   Murumaa-Mengel, M. & Klaassen, M. (2024). Episode 13: folk theories and media audiences (Victor Wiard). *Dialoogia.*

25.   Murumaa-Mengel, M. & Klaassen, M. (2024). Episode 14: social media architecture, social norms, and digital activism (Nathalie Van Raemdonck). *Dialoogia*.

26.   Murumaa-Mengel, M. (2024). Fans, Followers and Haters: Love-Hate Relationship with Microcelebrities. *Acoustic Academic: Sonic Stories from Social Sciences.*

27.   Murumaa-Mengel, M. (2024). Fighting Back on Toxic Social Media: Micro-Interventions as a Tool for Activism. *Acoustic Academic: Sonic Stories from Social Sciences.*

28.   Murumaa-Mengel, M. (2024). Maria Murumaa-Mengel: kui nutiseadmest saab nuhkimisseade. *ERR*.

29.   Murumaa-Mengel, M. (2024). Meediateemasid saab lõimida iga õppeainega. *Õpetajate Leht.*

30.   Põlendik, K. (2024). Propaganda ja vandenõuteooriad sotsiaalmeedias. *Vikerraadio.*

31.   Post, A. (2024). Õppimine koomiksite abil – Põrsas Pets toob digiteemad klassiruumi*. Õpetajate Leht*.

32.   Post, A. (2024). Viirustest veebivihani. Tartu lasteaialapsed said DigiÄKK-il digitargemaks. *Õpetajate Leht.*

33.   Raavik, J. (2024). Tulevased õpetajad selgitasid mudilastele internetis peituvaid ohte. *Tartu Postimees.*

34.   Raba, R. (2024). Taskuhääling ⟩ Some, Andrew Tate ja pornograafia. Kas möödapääsmatud teemad meediahariduses? *Pärnu Postimees*.

35.   Rosin, J. (2024). Huvitaja. Netiturvalisus koolieelikutele*. Vikerraadio*.

36.   Sagliocco, N. & Laurentiis, M. D. (2024). Come la propaganda russa cerca di manipolare l'opinione pubblica occidentale. *Zeta Luiss*.

37.   Suvine pärastlõuna. (2024). Maria Murumaa Mengel. Sotsiaalmeedia sõltuvusest. *Kuku.*

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38.   *Times of Malta.* (2024). Developing children's media and digital literacy through play.

39.   Veinberg, C. Õõvastav! Facebook ja Instagram tahavad kasutajate andmeid tehisintellektile söötma hakata. *TV3.*

40.   Кузнецов, С. «Лаборатория навыков» учит латгальских сениоров отличать правду от фейка*. LSM+.*

As scientific communication models indicate, this approach for the general public reaches the most people but has the least long-term implications for policy-makers. Next, we overview how our work aligns with European and regional policies and laws.

1.4. BECID2 Synergies With Long-Term Policy Objectives

As we aim our yearly reports to be helpful to policymakers in the Baltics, amongst others, we introduce a new section: overviews of local laws as well as pan-European policies that BECID's work has been designed to align with (as has the rest of the EDMO network, in many cases). This section replaces the previous summarization of our networking efforts with National Authorities and other EDMO hubs, which have been listed in full in *Subchapter 1.3.1*. But first, here is some background on why and what we aim to do with BECID2, our second stage of financing, which will hopefully seamlessly continue in June 2025.

With information operations, digital skill gaps, a lack of transoperational and sustainable cross-border collaborations, and hybrid attacks, it is possible to *undermine democracy and the rule of law without the threat of conventional warfare.* Information does not stop at state borders, and as strategic attacks are often repetitive, international and interdisciplinary collaboration is a key solution in policies tackling information disorders. BECID is designed to align with and contribute to several key EU policies and strategies to enhance information integrity.

First, *the Action Plan Against Disinformation* was adopted in 2018 and focused on improving disinformation detection, analysis, and exposure, strengthening cooperation and joint responses, mobilizing the private sector, and raising awareness to enhance societal resilience. BECID2 contributes to the plan by testing and monitoring new methods and tools, such as OSINT and AI, to detect and verify disinformation. We also emphasize fostering collaboration among stakeholders and educating the public on identifying false information, and our research and MIL interventions complement the identified macro-level approaches.

When the *infodemic* hit vus alongside the pandemic, in June 2020, the *EU issued a Joint Communication on COVID-19 Disinformation*, addressing the spread of medical misinformation and disinformation. BECID2 focuses on medical misinformation in one of the research tasks, and we have included another unknown crisis in our risk management plan. Additionally, we have onboarded a crisis communication expert and a strategical

communications expert in anticipation of being an agile and responsive partner to the national authorities, official EU institutions, and the rest of the EDMO network in the next crisis. We already have experience with such collaboration.

Together with the rest of the EDMO hubs in *the Taskforce on 2024 European Elections*, BECID contributed to the prebunking and debunking of political misinformation and will continue to do so throughout the electoral cycle in the Baltics (Latvia local in 2025, parliamentary in 2026, Estonia local in 2025, parliamentary in 2027; Lithuania local in 2027, parliamentary in 2028). During our collaborative work, we were also (re)introduced to the Rapid Alert System (RAS), which was established to facilitate cooperation and information sharing between EU institutions and Member States to respond quickly to disinformation threats. BECID enhances RAS by our work done in WP6, thereby improving the EU's overall response capabilities.

Democracy does not endure inattentive participants overloaded with information. Therefore, we connect to *the European Democracy Action Plan (EDAP)*, launched in December 2020, which aims to strengthen democracy in the EU by promoting free and fair elections, enhancing media freedom, and countering disinformation. BECID supports EDAP by implementing measures that ensure transparency and integrity in digital communication, and through advanced monitoring and reporting, BECID helps safeguard electoral integrity and media freedom. Another priority within the European Democracy Action Plan focused on efforts to overhaul the *Code of Practice on Disinformation* (CoP) into a co-regulatory framework of obligations and accountability of online platforms, in line with the upcoming *Digital Services Act* (DSA), which was successfully done in 2022. BECID's role in the second phase of work is now to monitor the Transparency Reports alongside national DSA coordinators and other EDMO hubs, carry out comparative work, and help confirm the truthfulness of the platforms' reports on their commitments under the DSA as well as the CoP. A sustainable collaboration model for the Baltics shall be developed, and new stakeholders from candidate countries will be included.

Instead of looking at disinformation, we find support in the Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) framework highlighted in the *Strategic Compass for Security and Defence,* which outlines the EU's approach to security and defense and which fact-checkers adhere to by default. BECID contributes to this by developing robust frameworks for FIMI to be the central analysis logic for researchers, fact-checkers, and MIL facilitators alike, enhancing the EU's resilience to hybrid threats and supporting the strategic objectives of the Strategic Compass. Adopted in July 2022, *the Council Conclusions on FIMI* also emphasize the importance of countering FIMI and hybrid threats and call for enhanced cooperation and capacity building. To extend our network beyond EDMO and therefore also reinforce the other hubs, we established good contact with the *European External Action Service (EEAS),* which has the East StratCom Task Force to address disinformation campaigns, particularly from foreign actors, therefore aligning with our work with policy monitoring and DSA coordinators.

The *new guidelines for the European Commission,* presented by President Ursula von der Leyen for the 2024–2029 term, emphasize the importance of digital sovereignty, security, and democracy. BECID2 aligns with these guidelines by promoting transparency and integrity in digital communications, supporting democratic values, creating a pan-European fact-checking network, and enhancing security against disinformation. Accelerating the development of new platforms and communication tools means that all hubs tackling this issue must remain agile and ready to question new regulative approaches, such as the AI act, or provide reports on new theoretical concepts, such as semi-automated claim verification. BECID2 has been designed with that in mind.

The following section has been written based on BECID's reports, as seen here, and the country profiles published (and contributed to by BECID members) by the EU Disinfo Lab.

We also recognize the differences between the Baltic states regarding regulative interventions. Estonia does not have specific laws targeting disinformation; *general laws* apply. For instance, disinformation causing harm can lead to civic defamation cases. However, exceptions exist; for example, in 2020, the legal department of the State Chancellery clarified that under the Penal Code (*KarS § 262 subsections 1*) and the Law Enforcement Act (*KorS § 55 subsections 1 p. 2*), distributing knowingly false information can result in fines or arrest if it violates public order, including intimidation and threats. Governance of MIL and societal resilience is divided among various national authorities in Estonia. Amendments to the Media Services Act, effective from 9 March 2022, incorporate the DSA Directive locally and include a chapter on promoting MIL: the Ministry of Education and Research is tasked with promoting MIL within state education policy. The Government Office of Estonia's Strategic Communications department coordinates strategic communication across different authorities and oversees psychological defense. Estonia's *Broad Security Concept* ensures the population is informed about disinformation trends, with the *Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service* and the *Internal Security Service* publishing comprehensive yearbooks on disinformation actors, tactics, tools, and activities. Building societal resilience against disinformation is reflected in several national plans: *the National Defence Development Plan 2031, the Digital Agenda 2030*, *the Internal Security Development Plan 2030*, and *the Cohesive Estonia Development Plan 2030.* While not always explicitly mentioning "media and information literacy" or "disinformation," these plans include components essential for societal/information resilience.

In Latvia, Article 231 of the Latvian Criminal Law penalizes activities involving knowingly false content or information that disrupts public order, institutions, or companies. This law is not intended to restrict free speech but instead targets the gross disruption of public order through spreading false content. Legal proceedings have been initiated under these policies, resulting in the banning of television broadcasts and websites. The National Electronic Mass Media

Council (NEPLP) is authorized under Section 13.5 of the Law of Electronic Mass Media to ban or restrict access to websites that threaten national security or public order. In August 2022, NEPLP banned 80 Russian media outlets, including Dozhd, citing them as threats to national security. Latvia has also fined media outlets for misusing words and mislabeling maps. Spreading fake news is also identified as hooliganism, disturbing public peace, for which criminal liability is provided. However, there are few convictions for disseminating fake news due to the lack of explicit references to disinformation in Article 231, making it challenging to establish a criminal offense.

Lithuania's Constitution forbids online war propaganda (Article 135 of Chapter XIII), and the EU Code of Conduct on countering illegal hate speech online forbids hate speech. The Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania also prohibits censorship and monopolization of the mass media, guarantees freedom of expression, and lays down the limits for exercising this freedom. Additionally, the Law on the Provision of Information to the Public - the principal law governing public information activities – established public information producers who fail to submit required data to the Ministry of Culture are deprived of their right to receive state support through the Press, Radio, and Television Support Foundation for cultural and educational programs. Additionally, the Lithuanian Law on Protection of Whistle-blowers ensures secure channels for reporting infringements, confidentiality in reporting, prohibition of adverse actions against whistleblowers, the right to be reimbursed for valuable information, and the right to compensation, free legal aid, and exemption from liability.

In addition to legal interventions, an overview of MIL interventions and approaches to psychologic defense and monitoring of FIMI and other information disorders is also relevant. Estonia is the only country of the three that has MIL in the national high school curriculum (35-hour module in year 11), with informal MIL training at high levels in all three of the Baltics, Estonia scoring slightly higher in the MIL indexes most likely thanks to the formal approach being supplemented by informal and nonformal methods. Monitoring of disinformation has been a part of the information security approach, hence present for more than 10 years in all three of the Baltics. BECID has been the most significant project on information and societal resilience in the Baltics. Still, it is noteworthy that Estonia already has an active MIL network, with 28 organizations regularly meeting. Media Literacy Week, organized by the Education and Science Ministry of Estonia, aims to shed light on the problem of disinformation and propaganda and is organized in cooperation with all or most of the organizations in the network, highlighting and amplifying everyone's work and setting common goals for the future. Since 2014, a non-profit blog called Propastop has been contributing to Estonia's information security by mediating information from state agencies, current media, and literature, but mainly from the real-time Russian news media monitor Propamon, which scans the Russian information scape for mentions of Estonia and is open for use to all. Propastop explains the background and analyzes what our neighbors are up to in the propaganda war. The Estonian Debating Society is a group combining MIL training with information verification, as they, among other things, conduct political fact-checks.

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In Latvia, several international initiatives are being implemented in the Baltics (and beyond). For example, the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, founded in 2014, *publishes reports* on information operations and manipulation campaigns, including the use of Russian bots in social media. The International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX) conducts MIL training through programs like *Very Verified* and *Learn to Discern*, targeting youth and educators in all of the Baltics. The Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLAB) investigates *disinformation narratives* and educates on digital forensic tools. *The Latvian State Chancellery's Strategic Communication Coordination Department provides* monitoring tools and training for civil servants and acts as a contact point between the state and tech companies. The National Electronic Mass Media Council (NEPLP) trains journalists, *monitors content* during crises, and maintains *a MIL database* in Latvia.

In Lithuania, a robust community comprising civil society, media, government, academic institutions, and NGOs counters disinformation. *Debunk.org*, a Lithuanian-based disinformation analysis center, and NGO conducts extensive research on disinformation, promotes MIL, and develops AI-based tools to identify and prevent misinformation. *The Lithuanian "Elves"* are volunteers who monitor and counter disinformation online, alerting the media community and government agencies about misinformation. Investigation groups like *SIENA* and the *LRT investigations team* conduct high-quality journalistic research, exposing corruption and disinformation. SIENA has contributed to significant projects like the Pandora Papers, while LRT has uncovered Kremlin documents outlining plans for the Baltic states. The Lithuanian National Crisis Management Centre (NKVC) *monitors national security threats*, including disinformation, and coordinates crisis management efforts. These organizations collectively enhance Lithuania's resilience to disinformation and promote media literacy. Our knowledge of the information ecosystem relevant to the Baltics is extensive, and we have designed BECID2 to complement or scale up pre-existing local interventions rather than duplicate them.

1.5. Collaboration With Students

In our year 1 report, we outlined the importance of students and the next generation in BECID's sustainability, see here. As there are around 6 million people in the three Baltic states, increasing the number of people involved in the field is essential, as human resources are scarce and can depend on too few actors.

To that end, we made a strategic decision by M4 when we finished our first Sustainability Strategy, where we maintained that in addition to carrying out activities, participating in conferences, and being visible in the media ourselves, **it is important to include students and young people in our work to empower the next generation of disinformation researchers, journalists, analysts, and MIL facilitators**. This helps ensure continuity in our field. It also benefits students as they learn the basics of (academic) organization culture, understand the routine of online work, and acquire various practical skills. We have several examples of including students in BECID's activities in 2024.

The University of Tartu launched a new course, "*Playful Development of Media Literacies,*" in the spring semester of 2024. The course explored the media world of children and youth and aimed to provide practical skills for teaching media literacy through games, ending with a big digital literacies event, *DigiÄKK (DigiRapid).* The digiÄKK format entails a series of rapid-learning sessions in which participants transition to a new learning station every 10 minutes. At each station, they are introduced to new content. Participating students had to prepare games for the event, and selected students were responsible for communication and organizational tasks. It was some students' first practical teaching experience as their studies had not yet reached the practical part. Later, they admitted that this experience was valuable for developing their MIL skills and gaining confidence to be a teacher. *All the games are available in English*!

DigiÄKK's success also led to continuing collaboration with some students from the course. In autumn, 10 students carried out MIL workshops at different kindergartens and schools near Tartu, Estonia, as a part of project Meediaklubi. The project started in the spring, and throughout the year 2024, over 300 workshops were conducted, and around 6000 children got an opportunity to develop their digital skills. It was an excellent experience for students to understand what children are doing online and how to handle these topics once they become teachers.

As a part of preparations for our hackathon (**T4.5**) in Riga, students from the University of Tartu carried out MIL in the MAIL project, which is more thoroughly explained in the chapter about WP4. The project helped us to choose young people who could participate in a Delfi workshop and later at the hackathon in Riga. Students were responsible for organizing the project and got valuable experience in preparing MIL materials, communicating with sponsors and the audience, making engaging content on social media, and solving unexpected problems.

This year, we also had one **virtual intern,** Lilit Bekaryan, focusing on communicative tasks. As BECID also has a Russian webpage and our intern has an educational background and is fluent in Russian, we took advantage of her strengths in designing her path with BECID. Her assignments included developing a LinkedIn strategy for BECID, writing Russian and English summaries for the DIGIRES Handbook, reviewing media literacy exercises, checking and improving the readability of Russian texts on the website, tagging fact-checked materials, translating media literacy materials, writing introductions to the DigiÄKK games handbook, identifying social media accounts of BECID team members, and analyzing LinkedIn posts.

Lilit's work and feedback were organized primarily through a shared Google Doc and email communication, allowing for clear task assignments and timely feedback. Her supervisor, Annaliisa Post, praised her for being trustworthy, meeting deadlines, and being open to feedback. Lilit's language skills, particularly in Russian, were highly valuable, and she effectively tagged Russian fact-checks and suggested new tags that proved helpful. Lilit made significant contributions to BECID by enhancing the readability and accessibility of Russian content on the website, improving the tagging system for fact-checked materials,

developing a LinkedIn strategy, providing valuable insights into the effectiveness of LinkedIn posts, and contributing to the development of educational materials. In return, she got a better overview of BECID and ways to develop MIL skills and adapt materials.

For BECID, she was the first test subject, including interns who never worked on-site but only virtually. Therefore, our pilot experience has encouraged us to seek more part-time interns who work remotely to join the team.

2. FACT-CHECKING

WP2 Overview

The main objectives of the second work package are to monitor, analyze, and debunk disinformation narratives, trends, actors, and tools within the Baltics, working in the three Baltic languages – Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian – as well as creating original Russian language content for vulnerable audiences, and translating relevant content to English for a broader, international audience.

In other words, WP2 focuses on strengthening fact-checking in the Baltic region by conducting consistent, high-quality fact-checks (**T2.1;** as of December 2024, more **than 650 Baltic fact-checks** have been published and added to the EDMO Repository). It also aims to establish an efficient, collaborative information-sharing system between fact-checkers and academic institutions in the Baltic States, ensuring regular activities based on shared principles and methodologies (**T2.2**).

As part of our commitments under the BECID project, we published regular fact-checks within media outlets, assessments of Baltic fact-checking, bi-weekly multimedia shows focusing on fact-checks and disinformation, analysis of propaganda and disinformation from Russia and Belarus, synthesis of Baltic disinformation trends, analysis of disinformation trends on social media platforms, and responding to requests for fact-checking information and joint research activities as directed by the EDMO Governance Body and the EDMO fact-checking network (**T2.3, T2.4, T2.5, T2.6** and **T2.7**).

In general, disinformation trends in the Baltic states share common themes, including narratives targeting Ukraine, Russia, and NATO, alongside misinformation about climate change, vaccines, and societal issues. However, key differences emerge:

- In Latvia, verified trends focus on economic disinformation and narratives about government failures, exploiting public financial concerns and inequality.
- In Estonia, disinformation frequently targets NATO activities and climate policies, with significant attention to narratives undermining climate action.
- In Lithuania, disinformation is dominated by narratives about Ukraine and Russia, alongside misinformation about COVID-19 vaccines and climate change.

These trends highlight how disinformation campaigns are tailored to each country's unique vulnerabilities. Across all three Baltic states, a unifying goal of disinformation is to erode trust in institutions, exploit geopolitical tensions involving Russia and Ukraine, and deepen societal divisions. Shared, pan-Baltic narratives include skepticism towards NATO, vaccine misinformation, and denial of climate change, all aimed at destabilizing and polarizing communities.

Task	Start	End	Status
T2.1 Perform regular fact-checks within private and public media outlets in the Baltics	December 2022	May 2025	Ongoing
T2.2 Regular assessment of Baltic fact-checker's work and sharing of best practices	December 2022	May 2025	Ongoing
T2.3 Bi-weekly podcasts/video show series that focuses on fact-checks, debunks, case studies, and/or dissemination of disinformation	March 2023	May 2025	Ongoing
T2.4 Analyse propaganda and disinformation entering the Baltics from Russia and Belarus and its Impact on society	December 2022	May 2025	Ongoing
T2.5 Analyze, Synthesize, and Share Baltic disinformation trends and impacts	February 2023	May 2025	Ongoing
T2.6 Analyze disinformation trends among Baltic Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok, and Telegram users	December 2022	May 2025	Ongoing
T2.7 Responding to requests for Fact-checking info and joint research activities selected by the EDMO Governance Body	December 2022	May 2025	Ongoing

As for disseminating fact-checks, in addition to the webpages of all the partners, *becid.eu* and *edmo.eu*, analyses are reaching a global audience through EDMO's bi-monthly Fact-Checking Briefs, and Dr. Signe Ivask continues to represent BECID at the *European Fact-Checking Standards Network Project.*

Feb 2025, version 1.0.

2.1. Re:Baltica

Re:Baltica is **a non-profit working in investigative journalism** focused on the Baltic region, extending to Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and other ex-USSR countries. Since 2012, they have been at the forefront of disinformation analysis in the Baltic region, focusing on super-spreaders and disinformation coming from Russia, especially before elections. Operating in various formats, including print and online investigations, documentaries about the Kremlin's propaganda methods in Europe, and regular fact-checking, Re:Baltica puts forth fact-checks and disinformation analysis for BECID in textual format and via documentaries.

In 2019, they established a fact-checking unit, "Re:Check," which publishes 20-30 monthly fact-checks in Latvian and Russian. In 2020, Re:Baltica became an IFCN-certified fact-checker and partnered with Facebook as a third-party fact-checker to combat COVID-19 disinformation. In November 2023, Re:Baltica joined the European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCSN). Even though "Re:Check" is part of Re:Baltica, it operates independently and has its staff, mission statement, and financing information all publicly available.

Re:Baltica allows free republishing of their work, which remains accessible without any paywall in Latvian, Russian, and English, all available on their website. Within the scope of work done for BECID in 2024, Re:Baltica's key achievements were as follows.

- **Published more than 300 fact-checks**, available *on Re:Baltica's website* and *BECID's website.*
- Addressed frequent misinformation on various critical issues, including Russia's war in Ukraine, European Parliament elections, climate change, gender equality, and food safety.
- Together with around 40 other fact-checking organizations, worked in developing a *fact-checking database focused on the 2024 European Elections*, called Elections24Check and managed by EFCSN.
- Published *five* quarterly reports identifying disinformation trends in the Baltics, covering specific themes such as fear-mongering of war in the Baltic states, EU-related misinformation before the elections, Russian disinformation operations in the Baltics, and LGBT+ disinformation trends.

2.2. Delfi Lithuania

DELFI UAB, *Lithuania's largest online news outlet*, established its fact-checking department, *Delfi Melo Detektorius* (Delfi Lie Detector), in 2018. It has become a trusted partner in Facebook's Third-Party Fact-Checking Program and has been a signatory of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) since 2019. These milestones underscore the organization's dedication to upholding rigorous fact-checking standards and combating the spread of misinformation. Information about its operations, fact-checking department, methodology, and funding sources is *publicly available*.

In 2018, the Demaskuok (Debunk) project was launched and supported by the Google DNI Fund and DELFI UAB. Utilizing an AI tool developed in-house, Demaskuok detects disinformation campaigns within just two minutes of publication, with a strong focus on countering Kremlin-related narratives.

By 2020, Delfi Melo Detektorius expanded its fact-checking efforts to include *Russian-language content*, addressing the needs of Russian-speaking communities. Today, its archive contains over 2000 verified facts in Lithuanian and 898 in Russian, with 55 new entries added each month. Leveraging its position as an initiative within Lithuania's leading news outlet, Delfi Melo Detektorius ensures the wide and organic distribution of its fact-checking content, exceeding BECID's website reach.

In 2021, DELFI UAB co-founded *DIGIRES* (Baltic Research Foundation for Digital Resilience), an association uniting journalists, academics, and NGOs to detect, analyze, prevent, and curb disinformation activities in Lithuania and beyond.

In 2023, Delfi Melo Detektorius launched an investigation into a book series through which pro-Kremlin ideology was being promoted in Lithuania and a cult-like movement tied with the Kremlin's regime "Ringing Cedars of Russia," the *"Deceptive Pages"* project. They began another broader overview of Russia's tactics to strengthen its influence in Lithuania through culture, *"Art as a Soft Power Tool."* That same year, Delfi Melo Detektorius introduced Lithuania's first Messenger chatbot dedicated to fact-checking and created visually engaging graphics to make its fact-checks more accessible and shareable.

In 2024, Delfi Melo Detektorius was approved by the European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCSN) and participated in several high-impact European projects, including AI@EUElections, Climate Facts Europe, FactCrisis, and Elections24Check. Soon, Delfi Melo Detektorius will launch a multilingual chatbot powered by Generative Artificial Intelligence, further expanding its ability to address disinformation across languages and platforms.

In BECID's team, DELFI UAB is responsible for the website design, hosting, upkeep, and fact-checking in textual, visual, and audiovisual formats. Looking back at 2024, their key achievements were as follows.

- **Published 104 fact-checks in Lithuanian, 14 in Russian, and 9 in English**, available *on their website* and *BECID website*.
- Published *one quarterly report* on disinformation trends in Europe.
- Published 24 TV episodes discussing the most prominent disinformation narratives, which we broadcasted live on the Delfi TV channel and uploaded to the websites.

2.3. Delfi Latvia

AS Delfi is the leading news portal in Latvia, with a monthly readership of 839 thousand as of November 2024. It has the most extensive online audience and is Latvia's leading social media source. Having won the Most Influential Media Source on Social Media award three times and voted the favorite media brand in Latvia three, its Facebook page has the highest number of followers for a Latvian-language media source (187 thousand followers).

As a member of the Latvian Media Ethics Council, Delfi stands for the highest quality standards, and several of its journalists are members of the Latvian Association of Journalists. Since 2020, AS Delfi has published fact-checking materials and other content that fights disinformation under the particular category "Atmaskots" (Debunked), and they became IFCN-certified fact-checkers in late 2021. As for their work with the fact-checkers in BECID in 2024, the highlights of AS Delfi were as follows.

- **Published 106 fact-checks in Latvian and 15 in Russian language, available** *on their website* and *BECID website*.
- **Published 24 TV episodes discussing the most prominent disinformation narratives** recorded on the Delfi TV channel and uploaded to Delfi.lv channel "Atmaskots.lv" website.

2.4. Delfi Estonia

AS Delfi Meedia's investigative and fact-checking unit, Eesti Päevalehe Faktikontroll (which runs the podcast *Valeinfo! Paljastatud*), is an accredited member of the *IFCN* and adheres to its code of conduct. AS Delfi Meedia fact-checks claims from across the political spectrum as a politically neutral publication. Of the six people on the team, three are 100% designated fact-checkers. Three other people work on both investigations and disinformation topics. Frequently collaborating with the NGO Estonian Debate Society also enables AS Delfi to contribute to training the next generation of fact-checkers.

Delfi is the most visited online news site in Estonia, and the fact-checking unit benefits from it greatly. Even though the rest of the media corporation's publications use paywalls for revenue, Delfi Meedia's **fact-checks are continuously published without a paywall.** This allows the fact-checking unit to fund its activities with third-party grants or agreements, provided they maintain editorial independence. We at BECID believe that fact-checks should be accessible to all.

On average, AS Delfi Meedia's team publishes 37 original fact-checks (in Estonian and Russian) a month not including translations, along with a podcast series every two weeks. They are also partners in Facebook's third-party fact-checking program. In the scope of BECID's work in 2024, AS Delfi Meedia's highlights were as follows.

- **Published 419 fact-checks**, available *on their website* and *BECID website*.
- Made *bi-weekly podcast* episodes to go deeper into current and topical disinformation topics, which ranged from networks to spreaders to disinformation consequences. Most episodes included experts as guests.
- Published *three quarterly reports* on disinformation trends in the Baltics.
- Published several impactful journalistic investigations, both in Delfi and in international media, examining networks and influence operations related to disinformation and propaganda: *"Kremlin Leaks"* (cross-border investigative series; selected as a finalist for the Daphne Caruana Galizia award); *"This is how the Kremlin launched a massive disinformation campaign against Kaja Kallas"*; *"Predetermined topics, mandatory reports. A recent leak shows how the Kremlin is waging information warfare against the Baltic states"*; *"We created a new TikTok account. And immediately became a target of Russian propaganda"*; and *"Documents straight from the Kremlin's troll factory: how Russia once again influenced the European Parliament elections"* (another cross-border investigation).

Next, we will highlight a comparative analysis as an example of how fact-checkers and journalists amplify, disseminate, and further investigate topics covered in fact-checks in deep dives and analytical reports.

2.5. How Fear Of Being Dragged Into War Is Spread In The Baltics

Author: Annija Petrova from Re:Baltica/Re:Check

This summer, misinformation that those in power are trying to drag the Baltic countries into a war against Russia intensified, mainly in Lithuania and Estonia. Governments are allegedly considering sending troops to Ukraine; in Lithuania, the foreign minister and his family are leaving the country, while Latvia is provoking its eastern neighbor with threats of a nuclear war. This article explains who and how the Baltic countries are spreading these falsehoods.

"Lithuania to send 100 troops to Ukraine"

In the spring of this year, French President Emmanuel Macron repeatedly *said* that under the right circumstances, NATO troops could be sent to Ukraine. This was followed by a *wave of disinformation* in several European countries *about Macron* and Russia-related plans that NATO countries allegedly have. This is also what happened in Lithuania. Following Macron's statements, Lithuanian politicians, including Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė and Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis (both represent the *Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats*), started discussing the possibility of sending Lithuanian instructors to Ukraine to train the country's soldiers. Almost all statements by senior Lithuanian officials regarding the possible training mission were interpreted as calls for war, according to Aistė Meidutė, fact-checker for the Lithuanian website *Delfi*. Politicians' insistence that the country would not

initiate such a mission, as it would require the involvement of larger countries such as France, was ignored.

"However, disinformation spreaders re-interpreted these claims in a different light, claiming that Lithuanian politicians are ready to send Lithuanian troops directly into the warzone," Meidutė explains. For example, one of the fake news websites *said* that Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico had supposedly confirmed that Lithuania and other countries would send troops to Ukraine. Even though Fico noted that several EU and NATO member countries were considering this possibility, he did not mention any specific country.

Figure 2 - Screenshot from social media, Delfi Lithuania

Shortly after, it was falsely *claimed* on Lithuanian social media that the Lithuanian parliament, Seimas, had secretly decided to send 100 troops to the Ukrainian front lines. The originator of the news was Valdas Tutkus, a former chief of defense and a candidate for Lithuania's president. He posted to social media that the Seimas had voted in favor of sending Lithuanian troops to Ukraine.

In reality, Seimas decided to set the number of troops that could be deployed on international operations and missions. The resolution establishes that up to 100 soldiers and civilian staff may participate in a training operation in Ukraine.

"Estonian mercenaries are already at war."

Estonian *Delfi* fact-checker Marta Vunsh explains that in Estonia, the narrative that Baltic countries or Estonia are allegedly preparing to go to war with Russia is intertwined with messages of the ceasefire, "we want peace," and "not supporting Ukraine is better for Estonia."

In Estonia, various misconceptions spread after French President Macron's remarks. Portal *Eestinen* claimed that France had *decided* to move its troops to Ukraine and start a war with Russia. This led to speculation that Estonia had similar plans to send its forces to the front line.

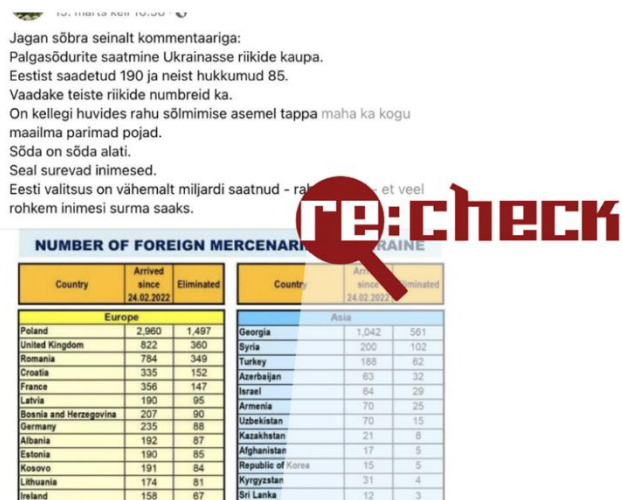This narrative was *pushed* in the past as well. For instance, an article was published on the Estonian fake news website *Telegram*, saying that the country's Defence Forces could send troops to the battlefront in Ukraine. The website had become popular during the *COVID-19* pandemic. This time, the misleading news story referred to an *article* by *Postimees*. However, the article did not mention Ukraine; it was about a plan to involve volunteer reservists in other foreign operations. On social media, this lie was reinforced by posts saying that Estonian men would be sent to the "Ukrainian meat grinder." Estonian *Delfi* fact-checkers found similar messages in at least eight social media posts.

Figure 3 - Screenshot from social media, Delfi Estonia

In the meantime, Estonian social media users *shared* a false table from the Russian Defense Ministry describing the numbers of "mercenaries" allegedly sent from different countries to Ukraine.

However, the fact is that neither Estonia, Latvia, nor Lithuania is sending troops to Ukraine. When Baltic nationals fight in Ukraine, they do so voluntarily.

"Latvia is ready to take part in the big war."

In Latvia, claims about the supposed plans to send residents to fight in Ukraine have not gained much traction and have not been shared all that much on social media. However, such attempts to scare people do exist. *Shortly before* the European Parliament elections, Andrejs Kozlovs, a MEP candidate from the party *For Stability!*, went on *TikTok* to claim the following in Russian: "A high-ranking Latvian official declared a few days ago that Latvia was ready to take part in a big war and use its army." In the video, he also pointed to a children's playground in the background and said that "many Latvian politicians want to turn these into bomb shelters." In the video, Kozlovs did not provide any evidence. He did not respond to *Re:Check's* phone calls or text messages.

"The youth and women are being prepared for war."

Statements by the Chief of Defense of Latvia, Leonīds Kalniņš, that men and women should be compulsorily drafted into the National Armed Forces were also accompanied by frightening slogans. Currently, women can serve voluntarily.

The opposition party's *For Stability!* official *TikTok* page and its leader's Aleksejs Rosļikovs *Telegram* channel posted claims in Russian that "girls" in the army would help with using the funds. "The politics of war is too attractive, and our elite is all in," one such video says. Another video posted to *TikTok* and *Facebook* said the matter had already been decided.

He said that "now they will forcibly draft girls and prepare them for the front lines, for war."

Meanwhile, the number of fake news stories in Lithuania increased after the country's parliament *approved a military service reform*. It establishes compulsory conscription of young people after they graduate from high school. Following this decision, *rumors began to spread* on Lithuania's social media that Lithuanians would have to fight in Ukraine.

"Lithuanian minister and his family preparing to leave the country."

Lithuanian Foreign Minister Landsbergis became a target of Russian disinformation. Lithuanian MP Aurelijus Veryga (Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union) asked him *a rhetorical question* about where the minister and his family planned to move.
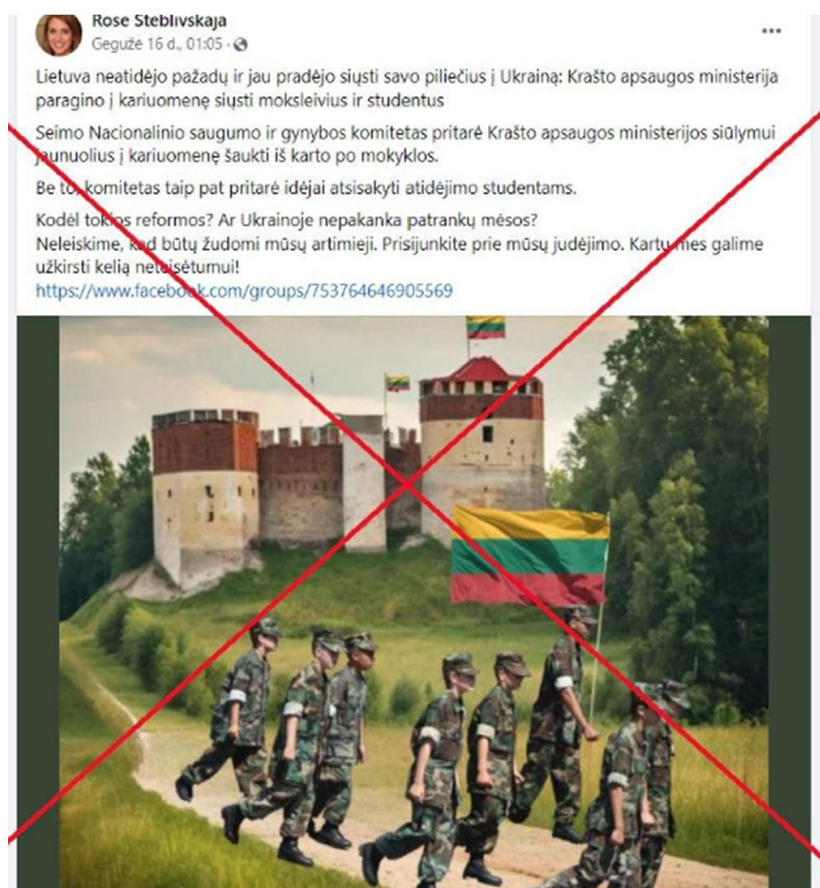
Afterward, rumors swirled on social media that the Landsbergis's wife was selling her private school business and preparing to leave Lithuania.

Even though the company's spokeswoman denied the rumors of a possible sale of the industry, this claim was picked up by Kremlin disinformation outlets, which kept saying that "rats were leaving the sinking ship" and that Lithuania would eventually be dragged into the war or get attacked by Russia.

Figure 4 - Screenshot from social media, Delfi Lithuania

Feb 2025, version 1.0.

TikTok spreads fear of war in Estonia.

In Estonia, pro-Russia *TikTok* accounts scaremongers about the country's involvement in the war. One now-suspended *TikTok* user presented an alleged quote by former Prime Minister Kaja Kallas that Estonia did not want peace talks with Russia and that Estonia wanted war and victory. Kallas had said no such thing; she stated that Ukraine must win this war.

Figure 5 - A screenshot from TikTok. It wrongly attributes a quote to former Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas: "We don't want peace talks with Russia; we want war and victory." Kallas has said nothing of the kind. Delfi Estonia

Estonian journalists also experimented by creating a new *TikTok* account. Estonian *Delfi* fact-checker Vunsh explains that **in just one hour,** the *TikTok* algorithm offered them **almost a hundred fake posts**, Russian war propaganda, and war-mongering videos to spread fear.

For example, one of the posts asked: "Will you go to war if there is a war in Estonia?" The video became quite popular in Estonia, garnering more than 46,000 views.

Nuclear weapons or "is Latvia choosing death?"

In Latvia, fake news peddlers and pro-Kremlin activists were trying to make people anxious by raising the alarm about a signature drive on the *public initiative platform Manabalss.lv*. The website allows Latvian citizens to submit their legislative proposals, and if one is signed by 10,000 or more, it has to be considered by the Latvian parliament, Saeima. The authors of this particular initiative propose to call on allies to deploy nuclear weapons in Latvia. At the time of writing, only 400 people *had signed* the initiative.

This, though, did not stop the criminal organization *Baltic Antifascists* from claiming on their *Telegram* channel that "Latvians were signing a nuclear suicide petition." Last year, The Latvian State Security Service *turned to the prosecutor's office* and asked to prosecute six

persons for running *Baltic Antifascists* and participating in crimes committed by the organization.

Figure 6 - Screenshot from Manabalss.lv website

The State Security Service determined that they were illegally collecting classified information about the developments in Latvia to hand it over to the Russian secret services, as well as praising and attempting to justify Russia's war in Ukraine and raising funds to support the Russian army in Ukraine. The *Telegram* channel has more than 20,000 followers.

Meanwhile, another social media user's comment about the initiative on *Facebook* says: "Is Latvia choosing death?" *TikToker* Ilja Černogorods also known as Magnuss, who has 4.5 million likes, also weighed in on the issue. A short video posted by the blogger, titled "NATO nuclear weapons in Latvia," criticizes the initiative's authors for causing controversy. Magnuss offers instead to "live peacefully for a change". This video has more than 56,000 views on *TikTok*. The blogger *regularly* criticizes the government by reposting refuted content made by opposition parties for the Russian-speaking audience.

In summary, there is no reason at the moment to claim that the Baltic governments are preparing to send their armies to Ukraine or otherwise wage war against Russia. Nevertheless, fake news sources, including pro-Kremlin bloggers, are using every bit of information to scare the public into believing that this is precisely what will happen.

Organizations that contributed to this investigation: Re:Baltica (Re:Check), Delfi (Estonia), Delfi (Lithuania).

3. RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

WP3 Overview

WP3 encompassed four key research tasks: **T3.1**, a systematic literature review of fact-checking epistemology and methods; **T3.2**, research into Baltic fact-checking practices and

tools; **T3.3**, an investigation into vulnerable target groups' reactions to fact-checking; and **T3.4**, an analysis of media and platform regulations concerning misinformation in the Baltic countries. This collaborative effort involved four main research partners: the University of Tartu, Tallinn University, Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences, and Vytautas Magnus University.

Each of the four participating universities took the lead on a specific task within this work package, leveraging their particular strengths and expertise. Tallinn University (**TLU**) spearheaded T3.1, focusing on evaluating existing knowledge and tools through a systematic review of scientific literature and assessing fact-checking and multimodal verification tools, resulting in two studies published on BECID's website and detailed in *BECID Year 1 Report* and also resulting in extra outcomes, such as the SLR currently in peer review detailed in *Chapter 3.2* and *the SLR on teaching Media and Information Literacy as an Interdisciplinary Objective*.

The University of Tartu (**UTARTU**) was responsible for T3.2, conducting interviews with fact-checkers across the Baltic states to analyze their backgrounds, work practices, and use of tools, as further detailed in *Chapter 3.2*. Additionally, UTARTU was responsible for organizing the academic publication and reporting for the website.

Vytautas Magnus University (**VMU**) took charge of T3.3, developing a conceptual framework to study audiences' reception of different fact-checking genres and formats, the main findings of which were presented in *BECID Year 1 Report* and also published in UNESCO's MIL Yearbook in „*Media and Information Literacy as a Strategic Guideline Toward Civic Resilience: Baltic-Nordic Lessons*" (Juraitė & Balčytienė, 2023, pp. 51–80).

Finally, Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (**ViA**) led T3.4, focusing on analyzing the regulative aspects of fact-checking, including implementing the Code of Practice on Disinformation by Baltic media actors. As all research was pan-Baltic, all tasks included researchers from each university and collaboration with fact-checkers through **T2.7** through discussion seminars presenting initial findings and building a proposal for guidelines specifically tailored for BECID's fact-checkers.

All research tasks were finalized by June 2024; only publication processes remain.

Task	Start	End	Status
T3.1 Evaluating existing knowledge and tools: systematic review of scientific literature, assessment of existing tools for fact-checking and multimodal information verification tools	December 2022	August 2023	Completed
T3.2 Comparative analysis of fact-checking practices, work processes, and	December 2022	Mar 2024	Completed

journalistic fact-checking genres across the Baltic States			
T3.3 Conceptual framework based on the study of audiences' reception of fact-checking genres and formats	March 2023	Mar 2024	Completed
T3.4 Analysis of regulative aspects of fact-checking	Aug 2023	May 2024	Completed

The collaborative efforts within WP3 in 2023 proved highly productive, surpassing the initial expectations for more publications as outputs than initially planned.

The research team conducted additional sandbox research with researchers and media literacy facilitators, *and a manuscript on using micro-interventions in education for media literacy development was also completed*. The findings from this work package were disseminated through various channels, including news media, conferences, and training sessions for civil society organizations involved in combating misinformation at the grassroots level, elaborated in full in *Chapter 1.3.1*.

To close up the research in 2024, the BECID built upon work done in WP3 *by developing a standard methodology for analyzing the impact of fact-checking on relevant target groups*. The collective expertise and collaborative spirit led to the successful close of all research activities whilst we await academic publication with some outputs. The following is an overview of the main findings of WP3 in 2024.

The full list of research published since *the BECID Year 1 Report* was published is as follows:

- Balčytienė, A, Bocullo, D. & Juraité, K. (2024). **Baltic democracies beyond the EU accession: media as a bearer of democratic culture and means of resilience in navigating uncertainties**. The Journal of Contemporary European Studies. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14782804.2024.2360030
- Buholcs, J.; Tetarenko-Supe, A.; Torpan, S.; Kõnno, A.; Vorteil, V.; Balčytienė, A.; Kasparaitė, R. (2024). **The Regulation of Fact-Checking and Disinformation in the Baltic States**. 1−48. https://becid.eu/results_and_studies/the-regulation-of-fact-checking-and-disinformation-in-the-baltic-states/
- Ivask, S. (2024). **Recommended Code of Conduct and Ethics & Common Principles for Researching and Monitoring Fact-checking.** https://becid.eu/results_and_studies/recommended-code-of-conductand-ethics-common-principlesfor-researching-and-monitoringfact-checking/
- Juraité, K. & Balčytienė, A. (2023). **Media and Information Literacy as a Strategic Guideline Toward Civic Resilience: Baltic-Nordic Lessons**. In M. Jaakkola, T. Durán-Becerra, & O. B. Onyancha (Eds.), Media and information literacy for the public good: UNESCO MILID Yearbook 2023 (pp. 51-80). http://dx.doi.org/10.26620/uniminuto/978-958-763-705-2

- Klaassen, M., Bucholtz, J., Himma, M., Lepik, K. **Unveiling The Many Faces of Fact-Checking: State of the Art of Academic Research on Information Correction**. *Full manuscript in peer-review.*
- Klaassen, M., Himma, M., Bucholtz, J., Kasparaitė, R., Berksun, K. **Human vs. Machine: The Role of Human Verification Practices in Fact-Checking in the Era of AI**. *Abstract accepted; full manuscript in peer-review.*
- Klaassen, M., Murumaa-Mengel, M., & Himma, M. (2024). **Social media microinterventions: Testing information activism as a media and information literacy tool.** Journal of Media Literacy Education, 16(2), 1-13. https://doi.org/10.23860/JMLE-2024-16-2-1
- Kõnno, Andres; Tigasson, Külli-Riin (2024). **Teaching Media Literacy At School As An Interdisciplinary Objective**. 1−21. https://becid.eu/results_and_studies/teaching-media-literacy-at-school-as-an-interdisciplinary-objective-2024/
- Murumaa-Mengel, M., Klesment, I., Klaassen, M., Post, A., Sigijane, K., Kõnno, A., Davidsone, A., Buholcs, J., Auniņa, I., Balčytienė, A., Juraitė, K., Antoneviča, L. (2024). **Developing Primary and Basic School Teacher's Media Competencies**. https://becid.eu/results_and_studies/developing-primary-and-basic-school-teachers-media-competencies/

Now, for the part you do not have to feed into Large Language Models to consume: summarised overviews of the published and unpublished findings of WP3.

3.1. Research on Media and Information Literacy, Resilience, and Education

The importance of literacy and resilience cannot be overstated. Therefore, this chapter delves into the intersections of media and information literacy, resilience, and education. By exploring how these elements intertwine to create a robust framework for navigating the complexities of modern information ecosystems, we hope to inspire readers to reach out and ask for more. Anything and everything we do is free for further use. Contact us!

Teaching Media Literacy At School As An Interdisciplinary Objective

In their study, Kõnno and Tigasson (2024) present a compelling case for integrating media literacy into school curricula as **an interdisciplinary objective**. This report focuses on the school curriculum, particularly in the Estonian context. The authors analyze how the concept of interdisciplinary media literacy has been reflected in scientific literature over the past decade (2013-2023) and its implications for teaching in general education schools.

The report acknowledges the ongoing debate in Estonia regarding media literacy education's importance in countering information disorders, which gained momentum following events like the "Bronze Soldier Campaign" cyber-attacks and the spread of disinformation related to global events. The authors examine how the "interdisciplinary" approach to media literacy is

defined and the extent of conceptual overlap in the literature to supplement the work done by national authorities in developing media literacy education.

They find that even as MIL has been in the Estonian curriculum since 2011, the discussion on the need for an interdisciplinary approach to MIL dates back at least as long, and there is seemingly still no consensus on how to achieve that goal. The report highlights the necessity of equipping students with the skills to critically analyze media, fostering a generation of informed and discerning individuals, and emphasizes the importance of a **broad-based educational approach**. *Read more*

Developing Primary and Basic School Teacher's Media Competencies

Murumaa-Mengel et al. (2024) take this further by **focusing on the educators themselves**. Their work involved designing and implementing teacher training programs to enhance media and information literacy (MIL) skills among future and current primary and basic school teachers, as well as non-formal educators. Recognizing the uneven integration of MIL in formal education curricula across the Baltics (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the report emphasizes the need for readily available resources.

The methodology involved a collaborative effort among five BECID partners: Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (ViA), the University of Tartu (UTARTU), Tallinn University (TLU), Vytautas Magnus University (VMU), and the Baltic Centre of Media Excellence (BCME). This collaboration included collecting, comparing, and reorganizing existing MIL materials from all partners into a comprehensive whole. The sample for the various activities included future and current teachers and non-formal educators involved in teaching MIL in the Baltic region.

Over 580 educators participated in the Baltic Zoominars, which aimed to disseminate the results to the target group. Key outcomes included the development of flexible e-seminars for in-service teachers, emphasizing practical tasks, sub-skills, resources, and lesson plans. The task also focused on training teachers on how to teach MIL and collected best practices for playful approaches to MIL didactics. The report aims to inspire educators and provide access to editable versions of the developed materials because well-trained teachers significantly enhance students' media literacy skills, a foundational part of societal resilience. *Discover the details*

Media and Information Literacy as a Strategic Guideline Toward Civic Resilience: Baltic-Nordic Lessons

Since our last yearly report, another perspective on this has been published. Juraitė and Balčytienė (2023) offer a strategic perspective, examining media and information literacy as a crucial guideline for fostering civic resilience. The chapter emphasizes the increasing necessity for MIL to act as a strategic guideline to counter the detrimental effects of information manipulation. Despite differences between the Baltic and Nordic regions, the

authors note similarities in the **urgency to respond effectively to these "inforuptions"** and media-related digital communication disorders.

The chapter argues that MIL plays a significant role in improving civic resilience and democratic sustainability, specifically within the Nordic and Baltic contexts, and provides insights into the specific challenges faced by the Baltic-Nordic region in this regard. It examines the influence of digital platforms and their internal logic on the news ecology, which professional journalists and fact-checkers traditionally uphold, and how these developments impact media functioning in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Denmark, Finland, and Sweden, considering their contextual differences.

Drawing on secondary sources like Eurobarometer and the Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM), the chapter provides evidence of the relationship between MIL, civic resilience, and democratic sustainability. Ultimately, the chapter recommends effectively **incorporating MIL into educational and policy frameworks to enhance societal resilience** and stresses that the structural aspects of resilience, including media freedom, system viability, and accessibility, require reinforcement through MIL-informed guidance that considers the specific challenges of the evolving information ecosystem.

The authors emphasize the need for close cooperation among stakeholders within each country, regionally and globally, to achieve a media-informed and resilient citizenry capable of withstanding information disruption and ensuring democratic sustainability and well-being for all. *Explore further*

Baltic Democracies Beyond the EU Accession: Media as a Bearer of Democratic Culture and Means of Resilience in Navigating Uncertainties

Carrying on from where the previous study left off and adopting a 'process-focused' approach aims to illustrate how democratic institutions in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, particularly conventional news media, strive to maintain distinctive aspects of a shared democratic culture amidst intensified information disruptions. These disruptions include the surge of online disinformation, information manipulation, and a decline in institutional trust.

This analysis of Baltic resilience is based on two key pillars: **the media's institutional position** and **the agentive aspect**, which refers to the public's self-efficacy and perceptions in countering 'inforuptions' in the Baltic region. Balčytienė, Bocullo, and Juraitė (2024) specifically examine the role of media in fostering democratic culture and resilience in these Baltic democracies, as two decades after the 2004 enlargement of the European Union, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia have established themselves as a resilient Baltic political, cultural, and geographic region. Still, this period of change also brought socio-cultural volatility and contemporary vulnerabilities, including escalating inequalities, populism, polarization, and social discontent.

The key finding of their research highlights the pivotal role of media in maintaining democratic values and resilience against information disruptions. This reinforces that media is crucial in navigating the uncertainties and challenges the Baltic nations face in the contemporary information landscape. *Read in full here.*

Social Media Microinterventions: Testing Information Activism as a Media and Information Literacy Tool

Klaassen, Murumaa-Mengel, and Himma (2024) introduce the concept of social media microinterventions, testing the efficacy of information activism as a tool for media and information literacy. Using an action research approach, the study was conducted in a university setting, involving students in various microintervention activities. In other words? This study design puts the notion of „we are not simply here to observe and monitor but to offer a path forward" that BECID's members harbor into action.

The study's key finding is the **development of three distinct roles in information activism**: the Worker Bees (focused on microprotections), the Meerkats (microaffirmations), and the Lions (microchallenges). Furthermore, the study highlights the "phoenixing cycle" as a recurring pattern of emotional and engagement states experienced by participants during their collective interventions. They then observed and analyzed the participants' engagement in these roles throughout a cycle of coping mechanisms and emotional responses termed the **"phoenixing cycle,"** which included exhaustion, disappointment, group support, feedback, and encouragement. The recurring patterns of engagement and disengagement showed in collective interventions and private reflections after the experiment. The approach offers a refreshing perspective on how small, targeted actions can significantly impact.

The research positions **microinterventions as valuable information activism tools** and suggest their potential to enhance MIL and informational resilience. The approach offers a refreshing perspective on how small, targeted actions can make a significant impact. The article was published in the *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, Vol. 16, Issue 2 (2024). *Dive into the study*

3.2. Research on Fact-checkers and Fact-checking

As the digital age continues to unfold, the battle against disinformation and the quest for accurate fact-checking has become paramount. In cooperation with fact-checkers of BECID and their professional networks, we have been able to interview fact-checkers from all organizations conducting regular fact-checks in the Baltics; we have mapped out the legal environment they operate in; and finally, we have focused on the efficacy of fact-checks in an AI-powered information environment.

However, first and foremost, we concentrate on conceptualizing lessons learned.

Recommended Code of Conduct and Ethics & Common Principles for Researching and Monitoring Fact-Checking

Ivask (2024) offers a set of recommended guidelines and ethical principles for researching and monitoring fact-checking, drawing from a review of existing frameworks like the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) and the European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCSN), supplemented by expert interviews. In other words? This report translates the BECID project's commitment to combating information disorders and fostering media literacy in the Baltics into tangible guidelines for fact-checkers and researchers.

The key contribution is **outlining common principles for assessing fact-checking**, but the report also identifies challenges and dilemmas faced by fact-checkers, offering analysis and recommendations. The report emphasizes the importance of ethical standards to ensure the trustworthiness and effectiveness of fact-checking endeavors in the Baltic region.

The outlined common principles for assessing fact-checking include aspects like **nonpartisanship, transparency of sources, financial and organizational transparency, corrections policy, training** and **capacity building, compliance mechanisms,** and **community focus**. The approach offers a foundational perspective on how established codes and ethical considerations can significantly impact the fight against disinformation in a specific regional context. The report was published in May 2024 by the University of Tartu. *Explore the full report.*

The Regulation of Fact-Checking and Disinformation in the Baltic States

Buholcs et al. (2024) provide a comprehensive overview of the regulatory landscape surrounding fact-checking and disinformation in the Baltic States. This report systematically examines how fact-checking and the broader issue of disinformation are addressed through legal, policy, self-regulatory, and non-governmental actions in Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania.

The report's key contribution provides a comprehensive overview of the regulatory landscape impacting fact-checking in the Baltic region. It delves into:

- The **legal regulation at the national level**, such as Lithuania's specific criminalization of disinformation and Latvia's use of hooliganism laws.
- The **implementation of the Strengthened Code of Practice on Disinformation** by investigating the awareness and monitoring of this voluntary document by state institutions in Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania.
- Documents and activities **outside the legal framework**: non-binding communications from government and other official institutions, as well as interventions by non-governmental and extra-governmental entities, including handbooks, communication projects, research reports, and think-tank analyses.

- The **self-regulation** of journalism and fact-checking: codes of ethics of journalistic organizations and the internal rules and principles of fact-checking organizations, including their adherence to international networks like IFCN and EFCSN.

The report's main finding is that while no specific laws directly regulate fact-checking in the Baltic States, its practice is significantly shaped by the existing regulatory context of journalism, mass media, and broader initiatives to combat disinformation. The Baltic states have adopted diverse approaches to counter disinformation, from general criminal laws to specific amendments addressing new challenges like deepfakes. Published in June 2024, this comparative analysis of legal documents and policies, supplemented by stakeholder interviews, offers a detailed understanding of the complex environment in which Baltic fact-checkers operate. *Read more*

Unveiling The Many Faces of Fact-Checking: State of the Art of Academic Research on Information Correction

As this article is in peer review and accepted to be published in the Central European Journal of Communication (CEJC), we will highlight key elements and discussion points in this chapter. Happy to send the manuscript to anyone interested in reading pre-publication.

Klaassen et al. (2024) delve into the multifaceted world of fact-checking, presenting a state-of-the-art review of academic research on information correction. Why?

There have been several funding initiatives to promote fact-checking as a tool for combating information disorder (The Fact-Checking Innovation Initiative.[1]; AFP Fact Check[2]; European Digital Media Observatory Fact-Checking[3]). According to the Reporters' Lab database, the **number of fact-check outlets** has increased significantly – from 11 sites in 2008 to 424 in 2022, which indicates **a 3854 percent increase**. By 2023, the number of fact-checking organizations had dropped to 417[4]. This rapidly emerging field demands revision – a helicopter view – on the topics and domains of academic research.

The study systematically reviewed existing research on fact-checking to understand the field's current state and identify key trends and gaps. The SLR highlights a significant surge in interest in fact-checking research since 2010, particularly after 2016 due to events like the US Presidential elections and Brexit.

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[1] *https://www.poynter.org/innovation-initiative/*
[2] *https://factcheck.afp.com/*
[3] *https://edmo.eu/fact-checking/*
[4] *https://reporterslab.org/category/fact-checking/*

Feb 2025, version 1.0.

RQ: What research topics and topical domains are studied in fact-checking research?

The main contribution is a **systematic literature review (SLR)** of **675 English-language academic publications on fact-checking from 2010 to 2023,** delving into various aspects of fact-checking, including infrastructure, practices, tools, genres, effectiveness, public perception, and the role of AI.

The SLR gives an overview of studies done on:

- **Conceptualization of Fact-Checking**, disinformation mapping, the evolution of fact-checking, and the epistemology.
- Examining **the effectiveness of fact-checking**, pre-bunking, correcting, and flagging falsehoods.
- **Fact-Checking Domains**: regionally different, but generally can be divided into specific areas like COVID-19, politics, medicine, climate change, and armed conflicts.
- Analyzing fact-checking research **focusing on different geographical regions**, emphasizing the weight that U.S-focused research holds in the field currently and the need to diversify efficacy studies.
- Investigating the work of fact-checkers and journalists in verifying information and the infrastructure and perceptions surrounding these **professional practices**, emphasizing AI tools.
- **Fact-Checking Outside of News Media**: Audience perceptions, human practices related to information verification, and MIL.

The SLR emphasizes the interdisciplinary nature of fact-checking research and underscores the need for refined research methodologies, longitudinal effectiveness studies, and a deeper understanding of the social context's impact on misinformation and fact-checking efficacy, significantly beyond the U.S.

The results also indicate a **high reuse rate for fact-checks** in MIL training, formal education, and research. This, in turn, means that **quality rather than quantity** is what should be chased in fact-checking units. An archive of verified information that is not behind a paywall, as quality information in 2025 tends to be. A public good rather than a new money-making model for news media searching for a new economic logic.

In other words, as a professional community, we ought to redirect our thinking on the efficacy of fact-checking as a persuasion device to an educational tool and false narrative archive.

Human vs. Machine: The Role of Human Verification Practices in Fact-Checking in the Era of AI

This article is in peer review, with the abstract accepted for the next stage of review in the special issue on "Disinformation in Times of Artificial Intelligence (AI): Consequences for Journalism and Mass Communication," to be published in Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly (JMCQ). We highlight key findings from our research on Baltic fact-checkers in T3.2 and are happy to send the manuscript to interested parties.

Klaassen et al. (2024) tackle the intriguing question of human versus machine in fact-checking through an in-depth exploration of fact-checking processes in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania amidst increasing information disorder. The study is a comparative analysis of fact-checking practices in the Baltic states, examining methods, purposes, target audiences, and challenges. It investigates the current use of digital tools and the potential integration of AI to enhance accuracy and efficiency in fact-checking while considering ethical concerns and professional standards.

The study highlights several key aspects of fact-checking in the Baltic states:

- The prevalence of dis-, mis-, and mal-information in the digital age is acknowledged and **exacerbated by the increasing volume of AI-generated content**.
- Fact-checkers in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania examine public claims to determine their truthfulness based on IFCN principles, **aiming** to provide reliable information as a public good. Their **purposes** include preventing the spread of false information, educating the public to promote critical thinking, and avoiding societal harm.
- **Fact-checkers require skills similar to journalists,** emphasizing analytical skills, source verification, handling large information flows, critical thinking, and adaptability. Proficiency in scientific literacy is also highlighted, as scientific sources are used often.
- Fact-checkers **prioritize information with high distribution and potential for harm**, often related to current affairs like science, the war in Ukraine, climate change, and political claims. The selection process relies on journalistic judgment. There is high awareness of the risk of amplifying mis- or disinformation that might have remained hidden for a significant portion of the potential auditorium.
- Fact-checkers rely on various **sources**, including public official sources, scientific studies, expert opinions, other reports, and the entities about whom claims are made, prioritizing trustworthiness and expertise.
- **Monitoring tools** for media and social media virality are standard, alongside search engines and reverse image search. Specific tools for information verification are considered secondary to journalistic experience.
- **Target audiences in fact-checkers' eyes** include the general public, those not firmly persuaded by disinformation, and politicians. Dissemination occurs through news articles, podcasts, radio programs, and collaborations with other projects, often integrated within the news organization's regular content flow.

- **Common challenges** include selecting topics, specific unverifiable claims, decreasing primary sources, resource scarcity (especially time), the evolving nature of disinformation, and increasing attacks on fact-checkers.
- While AI is used for some news and data analysis automation, **AI integration into fact-checking workflows in the Baltic states is limited, and no work process is fully automated.** Baltic fact-checkers prioritize human sources and judgment due to reliability, accountability, and the nature of some information. They see a need for AI tools to assist with monitoring and bias evaluation rather than full automation.

To conclude, the results highlight the continued importance of human verification practices while acknowledging the potential for AI to support and enhance the work of fact-checkers, provided that tools are developed to address their specific needs and ethical considerations are paramount. This study offers an empirical perspective on the practical realities of fact-checking in a specific geopolitical context and the context of small states – as we have highlighted above. There has to be some sort of automation of information correction, as human resources are not enough to go up against industrial scales of AI-generated false information. Still, for now, none of the work processes are fully automated.

This begs the question from other countries: Who uses all AI tools developed for fact-checkers, and what should developers focus on if full automation remains unreliable? Moreover, is fact-checking a trend, a buzzword, or is it here to stay as a supportive measure in building societal (information) resilience?

4. ESTABLISHMENT AND EXECUTION OF MIL ACTIVITIES

WP4 Overview

The Media and Information Literacy (MIL) team employs research-based and creative methods to enhance media literacy among diverse target audiences. In 2024, the group organized **150 training sessions, seminars, workshops, and presentations** in the Baltics and internationally. These activities aimed to reach a broad spectrum of participants, **with over 10,000 attendees** spanning children, youth, seniors, experts, internet users, companies, and policymakers. The group's impact extends beyond the Baltics, encompassing a wide range of activities in both local and international projects and global networks, such as the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO), the UNESCO MIL Alliance, and national MIL Councils, contributing to the development of media literacy and combating disinformation.

From webinars for teachers and youth workers in the Baltics and training sessions for strategic communication and education professionals from regions including the Baltics, Balkans, Australia, Malta, Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, Finland, Moldova, and Ukraine,

BECID's MIL team has shared their expertise and practices with a broader audience through practical and academic formats alike.

The group has developed various educational materials and learning resources for different age groups to support educators. These resources address information warfare, disinformation, online scams, influencer practices, and TikTok platform dynamics and are freely available on the BECID website. Additionally, the team offers a range of media-related university courses, preparing students from diverse disciplines in media literacy competencies.

In 2023, the MIL team focused on offering updated training programs for teachers to enhance their media literacy (**T4.1**). In 2024, a recommended curriculum, written materials, and lesson plans were released to support those efforts. No outcomes are produced silently in a corner and uploaded to the website, but we aim to deliver them on a silver platter to the end users.

The group has also been involved in **practical interventions** blending the physical and online worlds. For example, the University of Tartu's team of students created the MIL by the MAIL project in November 2024 (see *chapter 4.6*), essentially a media literacy-enhancing game in which nearly 1,400 young people across Estonia participated—the project aimed to teach high school-aged players how to navigate information overload effectively. Participants distinguished news from opinions, identified AI-generated images from real photos, and verified the accuracy of claims. Other initiatives, such as DigiÄKK, DigiKäkk, and Tähekeses Põrsas Petsi digiseiklused, have garnered widespread attention and positive feedback.

Task	Start	End	Status
T4.1 Developing teachers' media competencies via providing updated training programs	December 2022	August 2024	Completed
T4.2 Training new fact-checkers and young social media activists (young actors, student trainers) on how fact-checking works building on the experience from the EU-funded project DIGIRES	Mar 2024	Dec 2024	Completed
T4.3 Training the elderly according to the Digimentor model	June 2023	May 2024	Completed
T4.4 Coordinating Russian-speaking Baltic resident trainings	Jan 2024	Dec 2024	Completed
T4.5 Baltic MIL Hackathon Series	Sept 2024	Mar 2025	Ongoing

In 2024, there was a strong push to make sure we also hit the international stakeholders interested in our work in MIL and not remain boxed in the Baltics alone. For example, as a part of testing and disseminating work done for **T4.1** and as a part of the Media and Information Literacy (MIL) team's international collaboration, Inger Klesment, invited by Ambassador Dr. Kenneth Vella, conducted 13 media literacy sessions in Maltese schools, including St. Joseph Mater Boni Consilii, St. Michael's, and San Ġorg Preca College. She introduced Estonian-developed games, trained teachers, and discussed shared online challenges, gathering insights to adapt materials across cultures.

It turned out that children in Estonia and Malta use the same social media apps and play the same online games. Therefore, they are exposed to the same risks. As there were no differences in children's internet usage, the educational and playful activities developed in Estonia worked just as well as in Estonia, and children were very open about what they like to do online. Local teachers attended all the lessons, and afterward, they got a link where they could read the tutorials for other English games and download materials to continue using Estonian games in their teaching.

Although the games were almost the same as in Estonia, doing a direct translation when using Estonian resources is not wise. For example, local children's names had to be used in the games, and when talking about home address and the usual school-home trajectory, there is no point in saying that you should not take a picture under the apple tree in front of your house. All examples should be put in a local context. Also, local examples should be given as much as possible. For example:

- influencers,
- plants,
- weather (e.g., when talking about the digital footprint, it is not helpful to speak of footprints in the snow when explaining the digital footprint in Malta. Instead, the example of a footprint left by stepping in the sand should be given),
- everyday activities,
- rules (e.g., whether children in this country are allowed to go outdoors on their own, how old they are when they get a smartphone),
- peculiarities of the school (e.g., the first school was a girls' school), etc.

The more relatable the examples and games are, the more deeply children engage and are likely to take something meaningful away from the activities.

In a similar line, but jumping to **T4.2** and Lithuania, Auksė Balčytienė and Kristina Juraitė, together with the media education platform in Lithuania "Nepatogus Kinas" organized a virtual screening of the documentary "And the King Said: What a Fantastic Machine!" and the seminar "Visual Media: Divides or Connects?". The event aimed to update and strengthen the knowledge of teachers, educators, and youth workers about the influence of the media on us, especially the young generation, and also to discuss what kind of media literacy is needed most today. During the seminar, Auksė Balčytienė and Kristina Juraitė discussed the

main topics and problems explored in the movie. The professors of the Public Communication Department of Vytautas Magnus University talked about the power of images, invited us to see the world saturated with images and temptations in a "different way," and answered why it is important to ask ourselves every moment – is what we see on a smartphone or computer screen the truth? This supported the launch of new translations using the DIGIRES MIL methodology for teachers. The languages translated are Polish, Ukrainian, Russian, Azerbaijani, Armenian, and Georgian.

In autumn, junior researchers Patricija Lenčiauskienė and Rimgailė Kasparaitė held a workshop called "Media Walkshop" (based on DIGIRES MIL methodology) for Kaunas community members and leaders, as well as a special focus group session based on dialogic communication on media performance was held with community members of Kaunas City (organizers: Auksė Balčytienė, Kristina Juraitė). The walkshop has found its way to most MIL activities in UTARTU and Estonia, too, and spread further along with all our activities. All thanks to **T4.2** and the sustainable approach to MIL models that have already been developed.

4.1. Efforts in Enhancing Russian-Speaking Audience's Media Literacy

A targeted initiative was launched in addition to **T4.3** in Estonia to support teachers in Russian-speaking schools and kindergartens during the ongoing transition to Estonian-language education. This project, led by the University of Tartu (UTARTU) and co-funded by the British Council, aimed to equip educators with tools to teach digital literacy—a national curriculum mandate as of 2024 and one of the eight key competencies for Estonian general education. The focus on Russian-speaking educators reflects the broader regional challenges in integrating digital and media literacy into diverse educational settings.

The initiative addressed the unique challenges faced by Russian-speaking educators through a tailored course designed to support the integration of game-based learning into classrooms. The course featured:

- **Theoretical insights:** Covering media literacy in Estonia, children's online behaviors, and the 4C web risk model (harmful content, contact, conduct, and consent).
- **Practical application:** Educators developed and implemented digital safety games in their schools and kindergartens.
- **Hands-on learning:** Teachers observed game-based media literacy sessions and actively participated, enhancing their understanding of pedagogical techniques.

The training program was structured into five interactive seminars and included independent work, where teachers designed and conducted game-based lessons, followed by reflection and feedback.

The project achieved significant milestones in fostering digital literacy through game-based learning. Throughout **40 interactive training sessions**, the initiative reached children aged 5–7 in kindergartens and 7–10 in primary schools. A key strategy was encouraging teachers to translate the games into Russian, ensuring students could fully comprehend and engage with the activities.

The games were carefully designed to address age-appropriate digital literacy topics. For **younger children in kindergartens and Grades 1–2**, the focus was on foundational themes such as password safety, cyberbullying, digital footprints, targeted advertisements, and scams. Meanwhile, for **older Grades 3–4 students**, the topics expanded to include more complex concepts such as information disorders, algorithms, and information bubbles.

Gamification emerged as a powerful educational tool throughout the project. The use of playful problem-solving methodologies fostered creativity and engagement and facilitated open communication among children. Research has consistently demonstrated the effectiveness of **gamification** in enhancing learning outcomes, and this project provided further evidence of its value. By acting as informal focus groups, the games allowed children to share their digital experiences more openly, offering educators valuable insights into their online habits and behaviors.

Drawing on the experience, the team compiled **key recommendations** for designing and implementing digital safety games for Russian-speaking students. These included emphasizing creativity, ensuring age-appropriate content, and integrating teacher-led translations for better understanding.

The team developed comprehensive study materials for training teachers to create and facilitate their games, which are available for adaptation in other contexts. Examples of three games suitable for immersion classrooms are highlighted and accessible through the *Digital and Media Literacy Games for 5–8-Year-Olds* platform.

This initiative supported Russian-speaking educators during a critical transitional period and contributed to advancing digital literacy education in Estonia. The experience gained is a scalable model for similar efforts in the Baltic region and beyond.

4.2. MIL MEDIATHON for Russian-speaking youth in Daugavpils

As a part of **T4.2** and **T4.4**, in September 2024, MEDIATHON for Russian-speaking youth took place organized by the Baltic Center for Media Excellence, Rus.Delfi.lv and Cultural Institute "New East". This intensive program was designed for young creatives eager to explore the multimedia landscape while developing skills in technology, art, communication, and content creation and served as a dynamic space for learning, innovation, and empowerment.

Figure 7 - Mediathon

The core focus of MEDIATHON was on fostering critical thinking, countering disinformation, and reducing stereotypes within minority communities. The program combined a media campaign hackathon with expert-led workshops, providing participants with invaluable hands-on experience crafting impactful messages, enhancing critical thinking, and developing professional skills.

The creativity and hard work demonstrated by the participants will continue to have an impact. The two best campaigns were featured on the news portal Rus in October.Delfi.lv, allowing participants to see their ideas make a tangible difference in the media landscape.

Overall, MEDIATHON 2024 was more than just an event; it was a stepping stone for young creatives to grow, challenge themselves, and gain invaluable skills that will shape their future careers in the media and beyond. By empowering youth to make meaningful contributions through multimedia, the event highlighted the power of creativity and critical thinking in fostering positive societal change.

Figure 8 - Mediathon (2)

4.3. Efforts in Enhancing Seniors' Media Literacy

Through innovative intergenerational learning initiatives, the BECID team has made significant strides in promoting media and information literacy (MIL) among seniors. One of the most notable programs, "Digitally Together!" was implemented in Latvia and utilized the Digimentor model initially developed in Estonia. This approach empowered young "Digimentors" to guide seniors in navigating digital tools and environments, emphasizing tailored teaching methods to bridge generational gaps.

Key Achievements in Latvia:

- Over 50 young mentors were trained to assist seniors in building essential digital competencies through engaging and interactive sessions.
- A total of 44 participants from 30+ educational institutions shared success stories and insights, creating a collaborative atmosphere beyond the classroom.
- Topics covered included managing digital environments, identifying online risks (such as deepfakes and scams), and fostering safe digital communication.
- Feedback from participants underscored the program's impact, with seniors expressing newfound confidence in using technology and mentors gaining valuable experience in communication and teaching.

Highlights in Estonia:

The Digimentor workshops in Estonia focused on practical, hands-on learning experiences for seniors. Over 36 sessions covered topics such as artificial intelligence, Facebook navigation, internet safety, and using mobile apps. These workshops reached more than 150 participants nationwide, providing them with tools to engage in the digital world confidently.

The programs revealed the importance of contextualizing learning materials to the participants' daily realities. For example:

- Using relatable examples, such as local influencers or everyday digital tasks, proved vital in sustaining engagement.
- Group sizes were kept small (10–20 participants) to ensure personalized attention, enhancing the effectiveness of sessions.
- Additionally, young mentors emphasized the value of clear communication, patience, and interactive teaching methods to overcome challenges like cognitive decline and unfamiliarity with digital icons.

Building on the success of these initiatives, BECID plans to expand the Digimentor model across the Baltics, tailoring it further to meet diverse cultural and technological needs. Efforts are underway to strengthen partnerships with libraries, schools, and community centers, ensuring a sustained impact on intergenerational learning. By fostering collaboration and sharing best practices, the team aims to promote digital inclusion and media literacy across all age groups.

For more details on these initiatives and resource access, visit *BECID's website*.

4.4. "Skills Lab" project for seniors, especially from Russian-speaking minority in Latvia

In October 2024, several workshops or skills laboratories organized by the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence (BCME) in cooperation with NGO "NewEast" focused on media and information literacy for the elderly were held in the Latgale region of Latvia, thanks to co-financing from the Society Integration Fund of the Republic of Latvia. This region was selected due to its proximity to Russia and Belarus, as well as its significant minority population, making it particularly vulnerable to disinformation and propaganda from neighboring countries.

Although Russian and Belarusian propaganda media are banned in Latvia, many residents in Latgale still find ways to access this information. Additionally, there has been an increase in fraudulent activities targeting these individuals. As a result, enhancing media literacy is a critical issue in today's society. These MIL workshops are part of the **T4.3** and **T4.4** activities, which aim to strengthen information resilience among the Russian-speaking population in the Baltics.

The project involves several key activities:

1. Establishing three media clubs (skills labs) in Preili, Livani, and Rezekne. These clubs provide seniors with a two-day training program focused on information analysis, recognizing disinformation, and developing critical thinking skills.
2. Creating a methodology for media literacy trainers to promote a practical and interactive approach to adult learning in this subject area.
3. Conducting a training session for coaches who will prepare local coordinators to work with seniors using the project methodology.

Educational Program for Training Trainers

As part of the "Skills Lab" project, an "Empower Educators" program was created and implemented to prepare media literacy coaches to work with seniors in Livani, Rezekne, and Preili. This program is designed to equip trainers with the necessary knowledge, methodologies, and practical tools to effectively conduct classes and enhance seniors' skills in critical thinking and media literacy, and helps learn various strategies to:

- Work with adult audiences by adapting content and approaches to meet the needs of the older generation.
- Use interactive methods, such as games and practical tasks, to enhance engagement and reinforce theoretical knowledge.
- Recognize and explain information manipulation, fake news, and disinformation issues.
- Strengthen community resilience against information risks.

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The Empower Educators program was implemented at the New East Cultural Institute in Daugavpils, where coaches acquired essential skills and techniques through intensive classes. After completing their training, these coaches were assigned to lead classes in the project's primary activities, which took place in Livani, Rezekne, and Preili.

This initiative has laid a crucial foundation for the project's success by providing highly qualified trainers who can deliver theoretical knowledge and create an engaging and educational learning experience for the older generation.

Developing a Methodology for Media Literacy Coaches Working with Seniors

This methodology has been developed as part of the "Skills Lab" project, titled "Media Lab: Empowering Trainers." Its primary focus is to enhance media literacy among seniors, particularly those from minority groups who are at a higher risk of encountering disinformation. The goal is to provide practical and evidence-based approaches that foster critical thinking and media literacy while considering the specific characteristics and needs of the target audience.

The methods have been practically tested in the Latgale region, where minority communities are especially vulnerable to disinformation due to their geographical proximity to Russia and Belarus. This work builds on the experiences of local communities and tailors the approaches to ensure they are effective and easily integrated into the learning process.

The methodology is highly flexible, allowing for the combination of content in various formats and thematic blocks based on specific training needs. The methodology consists of three key components:

1. **Theoretical**: covers the foundations of media literacy, the role of media in society, and the ability to recognize information manipulation.
2. **Practical:** includes interactive activities such as exploring the information bubble, conducting expert reviews, and engaging in forum theatre.
3. **Combination of Both**: a balanced approach combining theoretical and practical elements to create an effective learning experience.

This methodology is a universal and practical resource that enables coaches to design curricula flexibly. It helps participants develop critical evaluation skills for safely navigating the modern information landscape.

The methodology includes an introduction to media literacy, highlighting its significance in today's world. It covers the specifics of teaching media literacy and presents various relevant topics organized into blocks for easier access:

- The importance and role of media literacy in today's world
- What is media literacy, and why is it necessary?

- The theoretical basis for media literacy
- The role of media in society
- Current challenges in the media landscape
- Types of skills and competencies developed through media literacy
- Learning terminology related to media
- Media literacy bingo
- Understanding media and its various forms
- Six types of content
- The view spectrum
- The light thermometer concept
- The information bubble
- The information network
- Expert assessment
- Activities: Attention, readiness, and startup
- Emotion as a factor in decision-making
- Anti-discrimination cards
- Forum theatre
- Socio-emotional competencies
- Inspirational closing remarks for trainers

The methodology developed builds on the experiences and best practices from the Empower Educators program, precisely the skills Lab initiatives in Rezekne, Livani, and Preili. This methodology will serve as an important resource not only within the project's framework but also for other educators in Latvia and beyond.

Skills Lab: Two-Day Learning Experience – Content and Activities

The two-day program offered participants theoretical knowledge about media influence and principles of information analysis, as well as practical lessons aimed at developing the ability to distinguish between facts and opinions and recognize disinformation.

This project has been particularly significant for ethnic and linguistic minorities, such as Ukrainians, Russians, and Latgalians, who actively participated in the program. These groups often encounter media content in various languages, which increases the risk of disinformation and complicates the evaluation of reliable information sources.

Approximately 58% of the participants were from language and ethnic minorities. They represented diverse communities and levels of media consumption, ranging from individuals who rely on a single media channel to those who utilize varied sources, including newspapers and social media, daily.

The events were successfully held in October 2024, with an attendance of 34 participants in Livani, 19 in Rezekne, and 25 in Preili. In each event, seniors learned theoretical concepts

and practical knowledge, laying a solid foundation for further engagement in the digital and informational environment.

In addition to enhancing seniors' skills as competent information consumers, the project fosters community cohesion by providing a safe and inclusive environment for intercultural dialogue and information exchange.

The Skills Lab project's educational program was divided into 12 thematic blocks addressing various media literacy and digital skills topics. Throughout the two-day sessions, participants explored the operating principles of the contemporary information landscape and mastered techniques for fact and image verification. They acquired practical skills to identify manipulation and disinformation.

Figure 9 - Skills Lab

The program's structure was designed to provide participants with a step-by-step approach that combined theoretical understanding with practical applications relevant to their daily lives. Each block focused on a specific aspect of media literacy, allowing for a versatile learning process tailored to the needs of older participants.

Overall, a variety of topics were covered:

- **Media Literacy Concepts.** In this topic, participants explore the fundamentals of media literacy and its importance in today's information-saturated world. The significance of critical thinking and the ability to analyze information is emphasized, particularly in the context of consuming and creating media content.
- **Information Field and Infospace.** This theme examines how the modern information space influences our perceptions and behaviors. Participants explore how various media outlets create information feeds, their roles within these feeds, and the social and cultural impacts they generate.
- **Media and Content Types.** Here, participants discuss the various types of media (both traditional and digital) and their characteristics. They learn to distinguish between news, opinions, advertising, entertainment, and propaganda, an essential step in developing critical thinking skills.
- **What an Information Bubble Is.** Participants are educated about information bubbles—what they are and how they form, often due to personalized algorithms. The

![Baltic Engagement Centre for Combating Information Disorders logo] Baltic Engagement Centre for Combating Information Disorders

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discussion covers how this phenomenon affects our perceptions and restricts access to diverse viewpoints.

- **Fact-Checking and Expert Review.** Participants acquire techniques for verifying the accuracy and reliability of information. They learn how to distinguish qualified experts from pseudo-experts and how to evaluate the information provided by different sources.
- **Emotions and Manipulation.** This theme addresses the role of emotions in media and the dissemination of information. Participants investigate how emotions are utilized for manipulation and how to recognize the signs of manipulation in media and social networks.
- **Image Verification: How to Check a Picture.** Participants learn to analyze and verify the authenticity of images using accessible tools and methods. They gain insights into determining whether an image has been manipulated and whether it is suitable for the context in which it is used.
- **Trolls and Bots.** This subject reveals the roles of trolls and bots in the information space. Participants learn how these entities are used to shape false public opinions, spread disinformation, and incite conflict.

Figure 10 - Skills Lab (2)

- **Telephone Fraud Awareness.** Participants explore modern forms of telephone fraud and learn how to protect themselves from fraudsters attempting to obtain personal or financial information.
- **Media Literacy Bingo.** This activity offers an interactive and engaging way to reinforce the knowledge gained throughout the program. Participants play bingo, testing their media literacy skills with questions and tasks based on the topics covered.

The Skills Lab has significantly impacted its members and local communities. First, seniors have acquired new skills to navigate the digital space confidently and critically evaluate information. These skills are essential for recognizing disinformation and propaganda commonly found in traditional and digital media. Second, the project has strengthened public cohesion, particularly in diverse communities inhabited by representatives of various ethnic groups. Participants from Ukrainian, Russian, and Latgalian backgrounds gained new knowledge and fostered mutual dialogue and cooperation.

Participants noted that the event's friendly atmosphere and individualized approach created a comfortable environment for learning at their own pace. This is especially important for those who have previously hesitated about engaging with the digital world. The Skills Lab project has become an important step in educating seniors and promoting media literacy in Latvia. In addition to strengthening the participants' critical thinking and information analysis skills, the activities and methodology developed within it also provided an opportunity to bring together representatives of different cultures and generations.

The project has significantly contributed to local communities by helping participants become more confident and informed information consumers. It fostered intercultural dialogue and strengthened social ties, which are especially important in today's rapidly changing information landscape.

"Skills Lab" is more than just an educational initiative; it bridges generations and cultures, allowing for collaborative learning, sharing experiences, and creating a stronger, more resilient society. This initiative inspires continued efforts on similar projects, ensuring seniors and other community members acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to be active and secure today.

4.5. Selection Of Materials and Interventions Created In 2024 By BECID's MIL Team

In 2024, BECID's Media and Information Literacy (MIL) team developed a range of innovative materials and interventions to address contemporary challenges in education and foster critical thinking in different audiences. Below is an overview of selected resources and their unique contributions to enhancing media literacy and digital competency in the Baltics.

- *Addressing Misogyny and Gender Roles with Young People*. This educational resource prepares teachers for talking about misogyny and gender roles. It includes seven different materials for addressing this topic.
- *A Teacher's Helper – Pornography*. This material addresses talking about pornographic/erotic media content in educational institutions or other contexts where there is an opportunity for extended discussions with young people.
- *Digital Media Competency-Enhancing Recess Games for 7–9-Year-Olds*.The material includes 10 different games that can be played during recess.

- As part of the *#TartuDataWalk*, six unique stickers are strategically hidden around Tartu, each representing a specific topic. Every sticker features a QR code that directs participants to a webpage where they can explore the topic further through thought-provoking content and engaging tasks. Each page provides hints to help participants locate the next sticker, making the walk educational and interactive.
- *The Tartu Art Museum's exhibition "The Secrets of the Leaning Building"* features a room focused on cyberbullying. It addresses cyberbullying through an interactive and educational experience. Featuring real-life cases and practical solutions, this exhibition offers a unique opportunity to tangibly explore the emotional and social impacts of cyberbullying.
- *The DIGIRES Handbook for Teachers* is an innovative and creative guide designed to help educators integrate media and information literacy (MIL) into their teaching practices.

These resources highlight BECID's commitment to empowering educators and young people with the skills to navigate complex digital landscapes while addressing critical social issues. For further updates on BECID's work, visit our *website*.

4.6. MIL in the MAIL Project: An Intervention for Developing Young People's Digital Literacy

By UTARTU students Kathleen Loss, Laura Jõgar, Margus Vahter, and Roman Valt

In spring 2024, we planted the seed of an idea: to create an engaging game for high school students that would help them navigate the information overload more effectively. Instead of merely delivering information to memorize, we offered something truly exciting – a fun online game paired with tangible rewards. Preparations began in September, and the game came to life by mid-November. The project was titled "MIL in the MAIL," it quickly captured the attention of its target audience, with nearly 1,400 young participants diving into the five-day challenge!

In the Advanced Professional Skills Course, you and your peers will develop an idea addressing a societal need. While **"MIL in the MAIL"** focused on boosting high school students' digital literacy, **"MIL in the MAIL 2.0"** could, for example, aim to improve media literacy among seniors! The possibilities are endless—you just need to define the idea and bring it to life step by step. Along the way, you will have the support of Estonia's top digital skills specialists—certainly from Lossi 36 and possibly the entire country.

Participants in **"MIL in the MAIL"** honed three key skills: distinguishing news from opinion, identifying AI-generated images versus real photos, and fact-checking claims. Each day for five days, players solved challenges, and correct answers unlocked codes to surprise boxes hidden in parcel machines. Many participants earned codes, leading to a thrilling race as the

game's social media revealed each day's parcel location. Only the quickest players got the surprises!

However, we did not forget the dedicated players who were not first to the parcel machine. After the game ended, we contacted the top five performers and sent them additional packages as a token of recognition.

The most active participants received bonus prizes, including an exclusive invitation to a **Delfi workshop,** where they gained an in-depth look at the fascinating world of media. Who knows—perhaps the next star journalist is among these students!

The rewards were even greater for the best of the best: a trip to a hackathon in Latvia, where participants further enhanced their media skills. And yes – all expenses were covered!

Figure 11 - MIL in the MAIL

12 Steps to Bring Your Game to Life

Ready to plan your project? Here is a step-by-step guide based on what we did to launch **"MIL in the MAIL."**

1. **Define the IDEA.** Start by breaking it down into CONTENT and FORMAT. Ask: "What aspect of media literacy do we want to address?" and "Who is the audience, and how do we engage them?" For example: "Fact-checking information, for high school students, using parcel machines." A clear idea helps you map out the rest of the project smoothly.

2. **Develop the content.** If your game involves questions, ensure they are clear and unambiguous. But do not feel limited—create a format that works best for your goals. Then, establish a timeline and assign roles.
3. **Choose the platform.** We created a dedicated website for the game: *meedia.ut.ee/meediakirjaoskus*.
4. **Prepare surprise boxes** to motivate players. Seek support from companies and delivery firms to fill the boxes without stretching your budget. Persistence is key when seeking sponsors.
5. **Select parcel locations.** Larger cities are a safe bet for quick pick-ups but aim to cover a wide area for inclusivity.
6. **Send out the boxes.** Stick to your schedule and factor in delivery times – do not leave it until the last minute!
7. **Launch the game!** Before going public, test it with friends or colleagues to iron out any issues.
8. **Promote your project.** To reach school-age participants, inform teachers and mentors. Use social media platforms like TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram to connect directly with students. Adjust your strategy for other audiences.
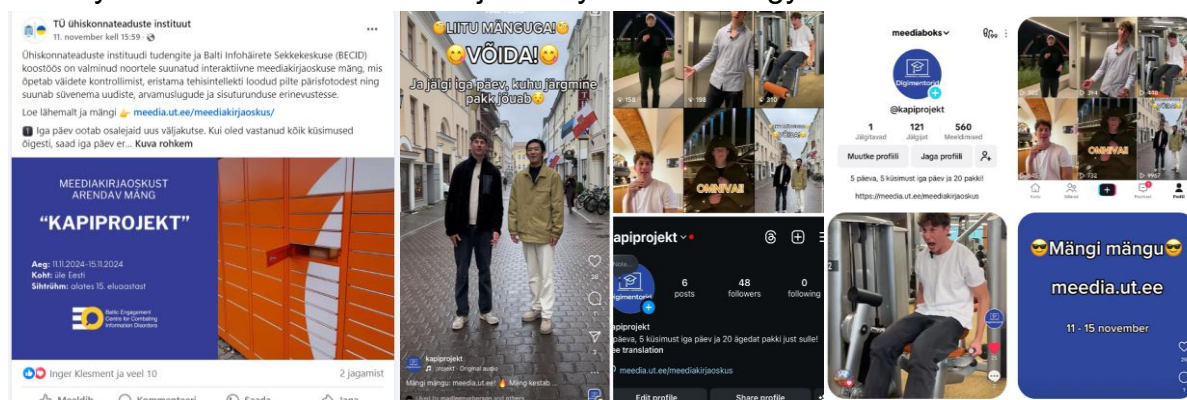
9. **Create social media accounts** and plan content tailored to each platform. For a wider reach, prioritize platforms like TikTok.
10. **Appoint a project spokesperson** to represent your initiative online and create a posting schedule with engaging content.
11. **Collaborate with influencers** whose values align with your project to boost visibility.
12. **Post your first video.** Introduce the project's goals, participation rules, and what players can expect in the coming days.

Tips for Sponsorship and Game Design

Do this	Don't do that
• **Start early.** Contact potential sponsors months in advance, as their responses may take time. • **Be confident.** Send your proposal to hundreds of companies. • **Tailor your pitch.** Align your offer with the company's mission and show how your project creates value for them. • **Target the right companies.** Look for organizations focused on youth, digital literacy, or safety. • **Use your network.** Teachers, mentors, and other contacts can help spread the word and connect you with sponsors.	• **Do not procrastinate.** Reach out to sponsors well in advance. • **Do not waste time.** Research companies before contacting them to ensure your values align. • **Do not overwhelm participants.** Keep the game's content concise and engaging.

With these steps, your project can succeed and inspire meaningful change!

5. STUDENT RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS OF 2023

This chapter highlights the annual stars of student research and work. All full texts are available (in their original languages) upon request from BECID's Project Management Team.

5.1. Conspiracy theories on TikTok and other social media platforms: Experiences and perceptions of Estonians aged 15 and above

By Gretel Juhansoo, a graduate of the bachelor's degree program in Journalism and Communication at the University of Tartu

My bachelor's thesis aimed to thematically map and get an overview of conspiracy theories circulating on TikTok based on the experiences of Estonian users who participated in the study and analyze the most popular conspiracy theory themes based on participants'

background data. Additionally, my objective was to understand the youth's perceptions of the impact of the spread of conspiracy theories on social media and the necessary skills to understand and cope with such content based on their personal experiences. To achieve these goals, I conducted a survey that received 344 responses. In the second phase, I carried out seven semi-structured interviews with 18–22-year-olds who, personally or through close connections, had experienced conspiracy theories on TikTok and other social media platforms.

Conspiracy theories are ideas spanning all areas of life that attribute global processes, including crises and catastrophes, to the secret actions of a minor, self-serving, and hostile group (Ventsel et al., 2023). Conspiracy theories have gained significant traction on social media. In this space, anyone can express their opinions (Kõuts-Klemm and Seppel, 2018), and where unreliable information spreads more rapidly than objective, fact-based content (Min, 2021).

With over a billion active monthly users, TikTok is one of the world's most popular social media platforms (Lindsay, 2023). Conspiracy theories are notably popular on the platform, where a community called "ConspiracyTok" has emerged (Grandinetti & Bruinsma, 2022). By 2024, videos tagged with #conspiracy had amassed over 30 billion views on TikTok (TikTok, 2024).

The findings of my thesis reveal that most Estonian TikTok users who participated in the study have encountered conspiracy theories related to government, elites, and societal control. Another prominent category of conspiracy theories encountered by participants revolved around popular culture. Examples include claims such as "The Simpsons" predicting the future or speculations about celebrities' private lives, which often align more closely with the terminology of gossip or hypotheses (Erokhin et al., 2022; Morosoli et al., 2022). Equally noteworthy are conspiracy theories tied to current events, such as Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine and the emergence of COVID-19 conspiracy theories.

Although conspiracy theories related to Estonia or shared in Estonia were mentioned less than half as often as foreign examples, Estonia's government and politics were the most frequently noted domestic category. Additionally, the social media account Ajuloputus – run by two Estonian women and primarily focused on health- and food-related misinformation, disinformation, and conspiracy theories (Malts et al., 2023) – was mentioned over ten times. While no significant differences in conspiracy theory themes were observed across sociodemographic groups, examples specific to Estonia were primarily mentioned by younger and female respondents.

Most participants in the study have been using TikTok for several years, primarily to seek entertainment, alleviate boredom, or escape daily worries. Survey responses and interviews highlighted entertainment and gaining new perspectives as key reasons for engaging with conspiracy theories (see Morosoli et al., 2022; de Wildt & Aupers, 2023). Notably, interviewees frequently mentioned TikTok's fast-acting recommendation algorithm. Since

none of them had actively searched for conspiracy theories, the algorithm's curation was identified as the primary reason for encountering such content on the platform.

Personal experiences shared during the interviews included following conspiracy theories on YouTube, mainly for entertainment, during the later years of elementary school. Interviewees who shared experiences observed through their close ones described how various conspiracy theories intertwined and influenced each other, creating a "super-conspiracy" world (Barkun, 2003). The experiences also highlighted different functions of conspiracy theories, such as the concept of deep play (Petersen, 2022), where a participant's relative risked social rejection by sharing such theories. Additionally, the social and existential roles of conspiracy theories were noted (Douglas & Sutton, 2023), with one participant mentioning how they found a sense of control and security in conspiracy theories during turbulent times (Schöpfer et al., 2023).

The impact of conspiracy theories was seen as both negative and positive. On the positive side, young people reported becoming more critical and skeptical of information over time. Negative impacts included societal division (Douglas & Sutton, 2023) and an increased likelihood of believing in other conspiracy theories (Douglas et al., 2019). Most participants highlighted critical thinking and independent fact-checking as essential for recognizing conspiracy theories on social media. Interviews also mentioned consciously monitoring algorithms, such as reporting inappropriate content, where survey respondents rated their awareness of the TikTok algorithm as generally average.

My bachelor's thesis is the first in Estonia to study the spread of conspiracy theories on TikTok, providing a unique overview of conspiracy theories related to Estonia or Estonia on the platform. Still, given the limitations of my research, future studies could focus on analyzing conspiracy theory-related texts and posts or examining young people who believe in conspiracy theories to understand better the influence of current trends and social media on the belief and consumption of such content.

The complete study can be found on the *University of Tartu student work database.*

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5.2. Difficulties Involved in Teaching Media Literacy as a General Competence, Using the Example of Teachers Participating in Media Literacy Training

By Ingrid Landeiro, a graduate of the bachelor's degree program in Journalism at Baltic Film, Media and Arts School of Tallinn University

Media literacy is becoming an increasingly important skill for people. That is precisely why, in an information-saturated world, people must be competent to use media and other information channels (Grizzle & Torras Calvo, 2013). It is, therefore, an irreplaceable competence that is important to integrate into basic education. In Estonia, according to the national curriculum for both basic and upper secondary schools, skills related to media literacy are taught primarily within the framework of general competence and a cross-curricular topic. This means that no specific subject focuses on media literacy competencies. Media literacy is also not a mandatory part of teacher education in Estonian universities, so teachers teaching the subject may not consider themselves media literate.

That is why my thesis aimed to determine how teachers assess their media literacy level and their difficulties in teaching it as a general competence and cross-curricular topic. Additionally,

I sought to investigate the perceived shortcomings of media literacy training. To accomplish these goals, the following research questions were formulated: How do teachers assess their media literacy level, what difficulties do they encounter in teaching media literacy as a general competence and cross-curricular topic, and what shortcomings do they perceive in media literacy training? The sample included 23 teachers, with whom two focus group interviews were conducted.

As it turned out, no teachers considered themselves fully media literate. Teachers whose subjects were more related to the field were more competent. For example, teachers of digital education, computer science, and Estonian language and literature could name complex media literacy skills, like different forms of media, being critical of sources, searching for information and assessing its reliability, identifying media influence tools, and identifying artificial intelligence material. Teachers whose subject was not as closely related to media literacy mentioned more superficial media literacy skills, such as text analysis, distinguishing between fact and opinion, and tasks related to source criticism.

Teachers thought the national curriculum's approach to teaching media literacy was unclear and did not ensure a systematic approach. With this kind of approach, teaching media literacy is dependent on the motivation of a particular school and/or teacher. However, this does not guarantee a coherent structure in media literacy education and may lead to students' incomplete understanding of media literacy topics. A cross-curricular approach to media literacy requires collaboration between teachers to map out which media literacy skills each teacher will cover in their lesson. However, this requires additional time, which teachers may not have.

Furthermore, teachers felt there were insufficient media literacy courses geared towards educators. Teachers' knowledge also depended on their motivation to participate in said courses. In addition, participation in these courses depends on the opinion of the school board. All teachers pointed out that to attend courses, the decision must be approved by someone from the school board. Several teachers also had to justify why participating in these courses is useful and what the school will gain from them.

McNelly and Harvey (2021) highlight that for young people to analyze media and participate in society more broadly critically, their teachers must also be educated in media literacy. Moreover, it has been found that teachers' confidence in teaching media literacy was directly influenced by how educated they were in the media literacy field (McNelly & Harvey, 2021). This begs the question: if media literacy is not part of the teacher training in Estonian universities, how can it be ensured that basic and general secondary education teachers are adept at teaching media literacy?

Thus, I concluded in my thesis that the current approach to media literacy in general education schools may be lacking, and a more specific approach to the field is needed. In an era where information warfare is a daily reality, media literacy must be effectively taught in general education schools.

The complete study can be found on the University of Tallinn student work database.

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What To Expect In 2025

We still have closing activities and the Hackathon from **T4.5** remaining for 2025. Most importantly, if all goes well with the Grant Agreement preparation phase, **BECID2 will begin in June 2025.**

The overall build of the project remains the same: fact-checkers, researchers and analysts, and media literacy facilitators. There will still be a few key changes in direction. The following is a table of the Call Priorities and how BECID2 correlates to them.

Call Priority	BECID2's Contribution
Reinforce the EDMO network by actively participating in governance, contributing to long-term strategy and independence, preserving the scheme of EDMO, and ensuring smooth communication when doing joint activities. Foster cooperation with various stakeholders, including fact-checkers, media practitioners, and disinformation specialists outside the hub. Ensure that the activities of the hubs are carried out independently from third-party entities, including public authorities. Ensure coverage by EDMO hubs in all EU states.	▪ New cooperation plan for joint activities with EDMO in fact-checking, investigations, research, MIL, and policy analysis, which will underline active participation in EDMO events and training and invite other hubs to our training. ▪ Work continued in all current 7 EDMO Working Groups and Task Forces, new ones as relevant ▪ The Project Coordinator from BECID1 as the continued single point of contact for coordination with EDMO and other stakeholders ▪ Independence of hub activities by implementing a collaboratively produced protection scheme against adversary behavior
Detect, fact-check, and disclose harmful disinformation campaigns, including those using new technologies like deepfakes and generative AI. Produce a continuous flow of fact-checks stored in EDMO's repositories. Analyze the impact of disinformation campaigns on society	▪ Regular fact-checking activities in local languages and Russian, with translations into English. ▪ New audiovisual formats of fact-checks ▪ 36 in-depth reports led by journalists and fact-checkers, and 10 Research Briefs on significant disinformation trends, narratives, tactics, tools, technologies, etc.

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and democracy, monitoring disinformation-related risks and harms. Deliver practice-oriented reports, studies, and investigations on specific disinformation campaigns. Enhance the detection and analysis of disinformation campaigns.	▪ Special attention on AI-generated content in the Baltic language space through large-scale testing of AI-tools in information verification ▪ 3 OSINT and AI training in English (open to the other hubs) and 3 in local languages to empower journalists and fact-checkers ▪ Testing out the machine-readability of fact-checks published to increase access to research data
Encourage the development and use of technological tools, including AI-based tools, to support fact-checking and analysis activities.	▪ Collaborative systematic testing of AI-based tools produced by the other hubs or other stakeholders ▪ Comparison of tools used in BECID1 to new tools introduced in BECID2 regarding long-term usability ▪ Introducing tools that tested best to stakeholders outside of the Baltic hub via website
Increase public awareness through MIL and communication campaigns, targeting both the general public and specific vulnerable groups. Conduct and support MIL campaigns tailored to the covered territory or linguistic area. Implement MIL campaigns and events at national or regional levels to increase societal resilience.	▪ 5 thematic MIL campaigns thematically connected to work planned in WP4 and WP5, such as the thematic focus on political misinformation or gendered disinformation ▪ 5 agile MIL campaigns to be designed according to relevant trends or joint plans with the MIL Council of EDMO ▪ Mapping of vulnerable as well as underserved audiences, as these might not overlap ▪ MIL interventions in the physical (i.e., street art, museum exhibition in three countries) as well as online spaces to increase the probability of accidental knowledge transfer
Contribute to the monitoring of online platforms' policies to tackle disinformation within the European legal and policy framework.	▪ Monitor and analyze online platforms' policies and their effectiveness to ensure compliance with the DSA and CoP via joint methodologies to allow for comparative research in the EDMO network on the Transparency Reports and Meta political ad library ▪ Facilitate Baltic networking between policymakers, DSA coordinators, and ministry contact points with EU candidate country counterparts via online and in-person events ▪ Disseminate regular Policy Monitoring reports to stakeholders, including policymakers, researchers, and the general public

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<td>Implement a communication strategy to reach a broad audience through various channels and organize training and outreach events. Maintain an operational website where all information is published in the languages covered by the hub, with the main menu available in English. Deliver annual reports on the hub's activities, including cooperation with other hubs and participation in EDMO governance.</td>
<td>

A communication strategy including proactive dissemination and cross-platform posting strategies
Outreach events, including 18 BaltsTeachMIL webinars and workshops and 3 in-person events, with visually appealing summaries and action points disseminated after
Continue maintaining an operational website with multilingual information, ensuring accessibility and API linking with the EDMO network's central pages
3 Annual reports on BECID hub activities will be combined out of our 12 Quarterly Briefs, including cooperation with other hubs and participation in EDMO governance, to keep EDMO, the EC, and other stakeholders aware of updates

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We are strategically broadening our focus from solely supporting MIL interventions in various educational settings to actively collaborating with memory and art institutions. By integrating the diverse resources and expertise within the GLAM sector—galleries, libraries, archives, and museums—we aim to extend the reach and deepen the impact of the EDMO network across our home countries. This approach will not only create new opportunities for teaching, engagement, and research but also ensure that these efforts are sustainable and widely accessible.

G stands for galleries, and for passing on knowledge acquired in MIL workshops via (student) art projects that interpret information disorders. Utilizing research, i.e research on radicalisation will feed into participatory exhibitions on shame and finding common ground between different generations in (digital) culture. Offline interventions in physical spaces, inc. street art, as a material for analysis in future MIL workshops.

L stands for libraries, and fact-checking/OSINT workshops in libraries led by journalists, fact-checkers and researchers. Hands-on approach to learning new skills and tools. Participation is free, but comes with the mandatory homework to pass on the knowledge to someone else. Policy recommendations based on the experience and data gathered at the workshops. Establishing local "digital mentors" who will continue getting invites to training.

A is for archives, and we shall co-create a strategy to archive regional disinfo trends and FIMI to counter the difficulties of data access from VLOPs. Introducing use of archives in MIL interventions, i.e. campaign "Search old newspapers for examples of contemporary information corruption" (first examples from a hundred years ago, comparisons with well-known local media events from late, to establish the repetition of history within the fact-checking genre). Result: pop-up exhibition.

M, as in museums, will be a part of the design and execution of inclusive exhibitions on online shame, digital childhood, information disorders etc, in cooperation with national museums. If feasible, an exhibition that will travel between the three Baltics. Opportunities to participate and admit to one's biggest blunders online!
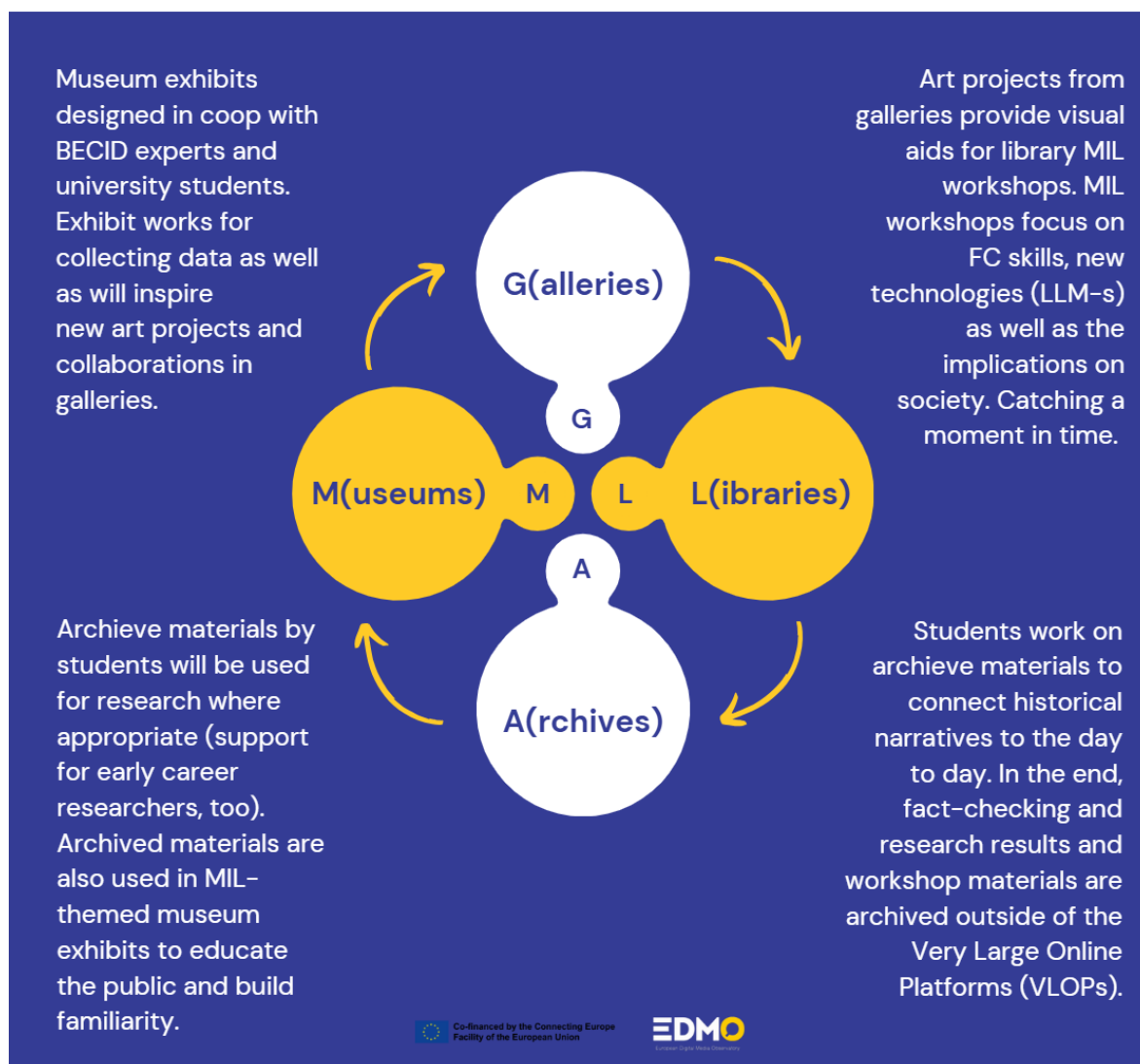

Museum exhibits designed in coop with BECID experts and university students. Exhibit works for collecting data as well as will inspire new art projects and collaborations in galleries.

Art projects from galleries provide visual aids for library MIL workshops. MIL workshops focus on FC skills, new technologies (LLM–s) as well as the implications on society. Catching a moment in time.

G(alleries)

G

M(useums) M L L(ibraries)

A

A(rchives)

Archieve materials by students will be used for research where appropriate (support for early career researchers, too). Archived materials are also used in MIL–themed museum exhibits to educate the public and build familiarity.

Students work on archieve materials to connect historical narratives to the day to day. In the end, fact–checking and research results and workshop materials are archived outside of the Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs).

Figure 12 - overview of BECID2's GLAM approach

Due to the budget being limited, there will be a cut in partners for the second round of BECID. One university, one non-profit and three fact-checkers will continue. This will simplify some of the work, and leave local-language interventions in the background in others. However, the scalability of our work, such as traveling exhibitions, enables us to also improvise when it comes to testing and piloting in one country or language and then continuing to scale up in others. Stay tuned for the BECID2 kick-off event, and see you all there!