



Policy Digests offer an overview of recent digital policy developments in Digital Policy Lab (DPL) member countries, including regulatory and non-regulatory initiatives aiming to combat online harms such as disinformation, hate speech, extremist or terrorist content. In addition to general updates, each Policy Digest provides a snapshot of topic-specific schemes relevant to the upcoming DPL session.¹

Section 1 Digital policy developments

Canada: Consultation about registration of online streaming services

Type Regulatory

Status Consultation

On 11 July 2023, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) closed its consultation on the modernisation of the broadcasting system as part of the Online Streaming Act. The Act was passed in April 2023 and modernises the Broadcasting Act to “ensure Canadian stories and music are widely available on streaming platforms to the benefit of future generations of artists and creators in Canada.” Specifically, the Act creates “clear rules for all broadcasters requiring them to contribute to the creation, production, and distribution of Canadian stories and music in a way that is flexible and fair.”

The consultation sought feedback “on how traditional broadcasters and online streaming services should support the Canadian broadcasting system, including Canadian and Indigenous content.” Specifically, the CRTC requested comments on (1) the concept of initial base contributions by online streaming services, (2) where the contributions should be directed to the benefit of Canadian and Indigenous programming, (3) obligations that are tailored to the broadcasters and online streaming services to which they apply, (4) how to ensure support for diverse and accessible programming, and (5) the best ways to promote Canadian and Indigenous programming and make it discoverable. A public hearing is scheduled for 20 November.

Ireland: Consultations on the Online Safety Code for and the designation of video-sharing platform services

Type Regulatory

Status Consultation

On 26 July 2023, Ireland’s new Media Commission (Coimisiún na Meán) closed its consultation on the proposed designation of video-sharing platform services (VSPS) as a category of relevant online services under the Broadcasting Act 2009 as amended by the Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022. The Commission has both the power and obligation to designate VSPS as a category of relevant online services to which online safety codes may be applied. The Act establishes a new regulatory framework for online safety and transposes the EU’s revised Audio-Visual Media Services Directive (the “AVMS Directive”). The AVMS Directive calls for appropriate measures to protect young people from potentially harmful content (which may impair their physical, mental or moral development) and to protect the general public from incitement to violence or hatred and illegal content (such as public provocation to commit terrorist offences, child sexual exploitation and abuse, and racism or xenophobia).

¹We welcome any feedback from DPL members regarding additional developments, as well as own submissions from DPL members who wish to be featured in the digest.

On 11 July, the Commission further [opened](#) a call for input on developing Ireland's first binding 'Online Safety Code for Video-Sharing Platform Service'. The Commission has a key responsibility for setting standards, rules, and codes for the different types of media services and relevant online services operating in Ireland. This includes responsibility for preparing and applying an Online Safety Code. Online Safety Commissioner, Niamh Hodnett, noted that the "Call for Inputs document explores the potential scope of the Code and sets out a range of questions that we would like people to consider." Specifically, the Call explores "appropriate measures to protect the general public and children from online harms," including safety features for users, terms and conditions, content moderation and complaints, as well as other measures including risk assessments and safety by design. The deadline for submissions is 4 September 2023.

UK: Preparing for the implementation of the Online Safety Bill

Type Regulatory

Status Consultation

On 11 July 2023, Ofcom [opened](#) a public consultation regarding classifications of regulated platforms under the Online Safety Bill (OSB), which will require certain online services (e.g., social media sites, messaging apps and search engines) to identify risks and introduce measures to protect users from certain types of harm online. Some services will be categorised as Category 1, 2A or 2B if they meet certain thresholds set out in secondary legislation by Government. These categorised services will be required to comply with additional requirements, including transparency reporting. Ofcom will be required to carry out research to help advise the Government on the thresholds and to produce a list of categorised services. Category 1 and 2B thresholds will be set by reference to user numbers and functionalities. Similarly, Category 2A thresholds will include user numbers. Specifically, Ofcom seeks input from industry "on how companies measure user numbers on the relevant user-to-user parts of their services."

On 12 July, the National Audit Office further [published](#) a report on the 'Preparedness for online safety regulation', examining whether the preparations undertaken by the Department for Science, Innovation & Technology (DSIT) and Ofcom for the implementation of the new online safety legislation are sufficiently advanced. Based on the report, the Public Accounts Committee [launched](#) an inquiry to question senior officials from the DSIT and Ofcom on the extent of preparedness to implement the OSB once it becomes law.

UK: Government response to Online Advertising Programme consultation

Type Regulatory

Status Consultation

On 25 July 2023, the Department for Culture, Media & Sport [published](#) the Government response to Online Advertising Programme consultation, [announcing](#) that it would propose new rules "to tackle illegal paid-for online adverts and increase protections for children." This would include "targeted legislative measures" that "address the most serious risks linked to online advertising." The approach aims to complement the Online Safety Bill, which is targeted at user generated content, and will build on measures tackling fraudulent advertising in that legislation. The government will also form "a ministerial-led taskforce over the summer to drive forward non-legislative action." Specifically, the government asks industry to support the effort by "improving the evidence base on the scale of the threat and impact of illegal harms" and "building on existing voluntary industry initiatives focused on tackling drivers of illegal harms." The government notes that the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) has taken on "an important role in developing innovative approaches to the regulation of advertising" - yet "there are limited circumstances in which online service providers are held by the ASA

to exercise primary control over the creative content and audience targeting of adverts.” Thereby, “transparency and accountability need to be spread across the supply chain, so that intermediaries, platforms, and publishers in the open display market can also play a greater role in the regulation of online advertising.”

US: Federal Trade Commission investigation into OpenAI’s Large Language Model & White House agrees new voluntary principles with leading AI companies

Type Investigation

Status Opened

In July 2023, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) opened an investigation into OpenAI, the maker of ChatGPT, to assess how it addresses risks related to its Large Language Model. In a letter sent to OpenAI, the FTC refers to “unfair or deceptive privacy or data security practices (...) or practices relating to risks of harm to consumption, including reputation harm.” The letter demands clarification on model development and training, including how the company obtained the data; all sources of the data, including any third parties that provided data sets; the categories of content included in the data how they are represented in the data corpus; all policies and procedures related to identifying, assessing, vetting, and selecting sources of data for the model; the extent to which various languages are represented in the training data. The FTC has signalled increased regulatory oversight of AI before, notably in 2021, when it warned companies against using biased algorithms. In May 2023, the White House announced actions that “will further promote responsible American innovation in artificial intelligence (AI) and protect people’s rights and safety,” including a USD 140 million investment from the U.S. National Science Foundation to launch seven new National AI Research Institutes.

On 21 July, the White House further announced that seven leading AI companies (Amazon, Anthropic, Google, Inflection, Meta, Microsoft, and OpenAI) made “voluntary commitments to help move toward safe, secure, and transparent development of AI technology.” These voluntary AI commitments focus on three principles: safety, security and trust. The administration notes that “voluntary commitments are only a first step in developing and enforcing binding obligations.”

Section 2 Topic-specific snapshot: “Climate mis- and disinformation”

This section presents summaries of selected analyses and commentary published by international organisations, governments, academia and civil society on the topic of climate mis- and disinformation.

Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 8 – Information Integrity on Digital Platforms,

UN Department of Global Communications, June 2023

This policy brief is focused on how threats to information integrity are having an impact on progress on global, national and local issues. The brief emphasises, “Threats to information integrity are not new. Falsehoods and hatred have long been spread for political or financial gain. Yet in the digital age these operations can be conducted on a previously unthinkable scale.” It defines climate mis- and disinformation as “false or misleading content that undercuts the scientifically agreed basis for the existence of human-induced climate change, its causes and impacts,” noting that “much of it seeded by the fossil fuel industry.” The brief asserts that “coordinated campaigns are seeking to deny, minimize or distract from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change scientific consensus and derail urgent action to meet the goals of the 2015 Paris Agreement,” emphasising that a “small but vocal minority of climate science denialists continue to reject the consensus position and command an outsized presence on some digital platforms.” It also calls out “Facebook’s algorithms” for “recommending climate denialist content at the expense of climate science.”

The brief proposes that the path towards stronger information integrity needs to be “human rights-based, multi-stakeholder, and multi-dimensional,” and calls for a UN Code of Conduct for Information Integrity on Digital Platforms that would build upon a set of principles:

- Commitment to information integrity
- Respect for human rights
- Support for independent media
- Increased transparency
- User empowerment
- Strengthened research and data access
- Scaled up responses
- Stronger disincentives
- Enhanced trust and safety

The UN Secretariat “will undertake broad consultations with a range of stakeholders” on the development of such a Code. Further, it may carry out “in-depth studies to enhance understanding of information integrity globally, especially in under-researched parts of the world.” Finally, the UN Secretariat aims to develop “tailored communication strategies to anticipate and/or rapidly address threats before they spiral into online and offline harm.”

Mainstreaming climate scepticism: Analysing the reach of fringe websites on Twitter,*Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), 15 March 2023*

This Digital Dispatch finds that fringe climate denialist websites have gained a foothold with thousands of daily mentions on Twitter by highly followed climate-denying actors, pundits and outlets. The analysis traced the reach of 32 fringe climate-denying and climate-sceptic websites [identified by EU DisinfoLab's research](#). These websites originate from the US and nine European countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, and the United Kingdom), producing content in respective national languages.

Mentions of these websites have increased significantly since the beginning of 2022, reaching over 10,000 mentions a day on 15 August 2022, and regularly achieving over 5,000 mentions per day since that date. The most used hashtag among tweet mentions of these websites is #ClimateScam, while other top hashtags included climate-denying terminology such as #celebrateCO2. Mentions of #ClimateScam were linked to various articles from websites arguing that global temperatures are declining, a false claim which has been repeatedly debunked. Spikes seemed to be driven by attempts to generate interest in the 'World Climate Declaration', a climate-denying document allegedly signed by over 1,200 scientists and academics, and published by CLINTEL, a Netherlands-based group founded by retired geophysics professor Guus Berkhout and journalist Marcel Crok.

To explore potential transnational linkages, ISD reviewed the reach of fringe websites in French, finding that 7 out of the top 10 most shared URLs in the French-language ecosystem came from French websites, notably climatetverite.net and climato-realistes.fr. The exception to this was the CLINTEL declaration, suggesting that outside of this specific example, non-English speaking actors mostly reference websites in their own language.

Deny, Deceive, Delay: Documenting and Responding to Climate Disinformation at COP26 and Beyond,*Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), 9 June 2022*

Drawing on research compiled over 18 months, with a particular focus on COP26, this report is a collective effort by ISD, CASM Technology and the Climate Action Against Disinformation alliance (CAAD) to understand and quantify the problem of climate mis- and disinformation. It examines the landscape, actors, systems and approaches that aim to undermine climate action. A [follow-up investigation monitoring anti-climate attacks around the COP27](#) further showcases the role of false or greenwashed advertising by fossil fuel-linked entities on Meta platforms (Facebook and Instagram).

The research finds that “whether through conspiracies like ‘climate lockdown’, or by conflating climate with divisive issues like critical race theory, LGBTQ+ rights and abortion access, the goal of much climate change disinformation is now to distract and delay.” It observes a “growing trend in disinformation away from outright climate denial towards a broader ‘culture wars’ frame.” Thereby, the urgency of proposed mitigation and adaptation strategies is “continually downplayed or condemned as unfeasible, overly expensive or disruptive.”

The report notes that “the failure to stem mis- and disinformation online has allowed junk science, climate delayism and attacks on climate figures to become mainstreamed.” The analysis emphasises “how a small but dedicated community

of actors boast disproportionate reach and engagement across social media, reaching millions of people worldwide and bolstered by legacy print, broadcast and radio outlets.” Furthermore, the report observes that widely spread disinformation often comes in the form of image-based content, including memes, noting that the “immediacy of an image can bypass critical thinking and, as such, prove a highly effective vector to land false ideas in the mainstream.” It also finds that “misleading content often lacks platform labelling, alerts or any form of added context.”

The report outlines seven policy asks which in tandem would help to “systematically detect, analyse and counter climate mis- and disinformation,” emphasising that governments, multilateral bodies, platforms, and the media all have a role to play. In brief, these policy asks are:

1. Implement a unified definition of climate mis- and disinformation within key institutions (e.g., UNFCCC, IPCC, COP Presidency); and b. Reflect these criteria in Community Standards and/or Terms of Service of platforms.
2. Enforce platform policies against repeat offender accounts.
3. Improve transparency and data access for vetted researchers and regulators on climate misinformation trends, as well as the role played by algorithmic amplification.
4. Limit media exemption loopholes within legislation.
5. Restrict paid advertising and sponsored content from fossil fuel companies, known front groups for fossil fuel companies, and/or other actors repeatedly found to spread disinformation that contravenes the definition in Policy Ask 1.
6. Ensure better platform labelling on ‘missing context’ and the re-posting of old or recycled content.
7. Enable API image-based searches to support research on viral disinformation.

The policy asks reflect both what is achievable in the near-term, and potentially without government interventions, alongside the more holistic measures needed to achieve change at scale.

Report on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation,

European Parliament, 8 February 2022

A report by the Special Committee on ‘Foreign Interference in all Democratic Processes in the European Union, including Disinformation’, which was adopted by the European Parliament, calls on the EU to “prepare better to fight off foreign interference and disinformation” including from “malicious and authoritarian countries such as Russia and China.” In this context, the report recognises the “urgent need” to address climate mis- and disinformation and welcomes the efforts at COP26 to “adopt a universal definition of climate mis- and disinformation.” The report further calls for “models such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change to be built on to create a global code of conduct on disinformation, a process that would provide the basis for a Paris Agreement on Disinformation.”

While the EU’s recognition of climate disinformation is promising, ISD’s Jennie King asserts there would likely be “pushback against any effort to formalise definitions, anchored in the claim that ‘green fanatics’ are trying to stifle opposing views,” noting that “those with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo often build their brands by weaponising and monetising ‘cancel culture’ rhetoric online.”

Discourses of climate delay,

Mercator Research Institute on Global Commons and Climate Change (MCC), 1 July 2020

This article looks at contemporary debates on climate action. It identifies an expansive – albeit not necessarily exhaustive – list of 12 climate delay discourses and develops a typology based on their underlying logic. These discourses accept the existence of climate change but justify inaction or inadequate efforts.

The authors find that “delay discourses can be grouped into those that: (1) redirect responsibility; (2) push non-transformative solutions; (3) emphasize the downsides of climate policies; or (4) surrender to climate change.” All discourses focus on the negative social effects of climate policies and raise doubt that mitigation is possible. They build on “legitimate concerns and fears as societies move closer to addressing climate change.” The authors argue that “they become delay arguments when they misrepresent rather than clarify, raise adversity rather than consensus or imply that taking action is an impossible challenge.” The article also calls for more research into the “adverse effects on climate politics at all levels, from regions, nations and communities to smaller social institutions such as schools, churches and households.” Céline Keller produced a comic adaptation of the study [here](#).

The Consensus Handbook,

Cook, J., van der Linden, S., Maibach, E. & Lewandowsky, S., 2018

The Consensus Handbook provides a brief history of the consensus on climate change and summarises the research quantifying the level of scientific agreement on human-caused global warming. It examines what the public thinks about the consensus, and the misinformation campaigns that have sought to obscure the research. It highlights the ‘Gateway Belief Model’, which finds that what people think about expert agreement influences a range of other key attitudes, including whether global warming is real, caused by humans, resulting in serious impacts and importantly, whether climate action is needed to solve it. It thereby emphasises that “informing people about the consensus is not a magic bullet that solves everything, but it is a powerful tool for helping people to understand climate change and reach appropriate conclusions about it.”

The Handbook considers how best to communicate the consensus, reviewing a range of approaches. It recommends using “simple clear messages, repeated often, by a variety of trusted voices” to enhance the effectiveness of science communication. Further, it notes that “efforts to inoculate members of the public against the misinformation campaign about the scientific consensus appear likely to help neutralize the harmful effects of that campaign.” It argues that “by exposing people to misinformation along with a clear warning that it is misinformation can help people become more resistant to such misinformation.” An inoculating text consists of a “warning that people might be misled,” and “preemptive counter-arguments explaining the techniques used to distort the facts.” Effective inoculation messages thereby require a “critical thinking approach to argumentation” to detect and deconstruct the “reasoning fallacies in a misleading argument.” This approach would allow one to “determine whether all the premises are true, and if so, whether the premises logically lead to the conclusion.”

About the Digital Policy Lab

The [Digital Policy Lab \(DPL\)](#) is an inter-governmental working group focused on charting the regulatory and policy path forward to prevent and counter disinformation, hate speech, extremism and terrorism online. It is comprised of a core group of senior representatives of relevant ministries and regulators from key liberal democratic countries. The DPL aims to foster inter-governmental exchange, provide policymakers with access to sector-leading expertise and research, and build an international community of policy practice around key regulatory challenges in the digital policy space. We thank the German Federal Foreign Office for their support for this project.