



Infodemics on Migration: A Threat for Society?

Fatih Yilmaz, Annalotta Järvinen, Mert Serhan Arslan, Iqbal Alibhai



To cite this article:

Yilmaz, F., Järvinen, A., Arslan, M. S., & Alibhai, I. (2024). Infodemics on migration: A threat for society? Horizon Insights, 7(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.31175/hi.2024.01.01>

Link to this issue of the journal: <https://doi.org/10.31175/hi.2024.01>

Horizon Insights Journal Homepage: <https://behorizon.org/horizon-insights/>

ISSN: 2593-3582 (printed), 2593-3590 (online)

Submit your article



Infodemics on Migration: A Threat for Society?

by Fatih Yilmaz*, Annalotta Järvinen**, Mert Serhan Arslan***, Iqbal Alibhai****

Introduction

This paper presents the research undertaken within the '**Immune 2 Infodemic**' project on 'infodemics' within migration related topics with a focus on Finland and Belgium.

The paper starts by defining this recently coined term "infodemic" in the domain of information disorders and explains the finer points in detail. Afterwards, it investigates how an infodemic can affect the understanding and opinions concerning migration as a theme. Then it presents three topics that are recognised to be the most affected by infodemic within the theme of migration: **A. Welfare System and Economy, B. Security, C. Culture and Identity**. This is then discussed in detail using various cases. Finally, conclusions are made, and some advice is given about how to protect oneself from infodemics.

1. We Have Heard of a Pandemic, but What is an Infodemic?

"Infodemic", as a term, started to circulate with the spread of Covid-19, although it was first used by David J. Rothkopf in 2003 during the SARS outbreak¹ to describe the negative and chaotic effect of spreading fake news via the media on the SARS crisis overall. "Infodemic" was widely used during Covid-19 pandemic in the early 2020, even by WHO² and the UN³. By definition, the term "infodemic" means "a situation in which a lot of false information is being spread in a way that is harmful."⁴

False information is information in the form of content, whether digital or otherwise, that is false. Either the facts are misconstrued, misunderstood, or outright fabricated.

Related terms are defined below.

- Fake news⁵ - "purposefully crafted, sensational, emotionally charged, misleading or totally fabricated information that mimics the form of mainstream news".
- Misinformation⁶ - false information unintentionally or unknowingly disseminated.
- Disinformation⁷ - false information intentionally disseminated with the intent to deceive, discredit, or harm.

Mis- and disinformation are distinct forms of false information, however, due to the realities of how we perceive information, it might be difficult to immediately distinguish between the two when presented with examples in the real world. Even an increase in the circulation of information, which is crucial to ensuring the right to information, may also cause the spread of an infodemic.

Although the term rose in popularity during the pandemic due to the high number of mis- and disinformation about the vaccination and the number of cases, an infodemic is seen as a larger concept and cannot be limited to the field of health. All possible fields from politics and society to culture etc., can be affected.

During the U.S. elections, Wardle claimed that there were seven types of mis- and disinformation: satire and parody, false connection, misleading content, false context, imposter content, manipulated content and fabricated content (see figure 1).⁸ These archetypes can be applied to any field.

This article is written as a part of the IMMUNE 2 INFODEMIC project funded by the European Union.

* Director of Projects and Partnerships at Beyond the Horizon ISSG

** Project Assistant at Beyond the Horizon ISSG

*** Research Assistant at Beyond the Horizon ISSG

**** Project Assistant at Beyond the Horizon ISSG



Figure 1. Types of mis- and disinformation (Wardle) ⁹

Infodemics can be harmful because false information can lead to false narratives. False narratives can lead to misinformed citizens unable to debate or ration the major issues being tackled today. This can prevent people from making truly informed decisions, and even by steering people toward decisions that conflict with their own best interests. Changing misinformed viewpoints might be very difficult, once adopted by large groups, it can become entrenched within the zeitgeist of the citizens of the nation. And unfortunately, once there, it is very difficult for certain narratives and mis- and disinformation to be dispelled. When mis- and disinformation begins to erode people's belief in the institutions of society, it can lead to problems including violence and, in some cases, bring about the weakening of democratic societies. This is compounded by an infodemic because of the speed at which the false information spreads before it can be fact-checked.

2. Migration as a Highly Affected Field by Infodemic

Migration is one of the main topics that suffer from mis- and disinformation. The topic itself is sensitive in terms of integration and the clash of cultures, and any kind of mis- and disinformation about immigrants can severely affect public opinion. [Repeated mis- and disinformation](#) can create an illusory truth effect in the society, and far right political actors and media can use this effect to find support for their nationalist and phobic ideologies.¹⁰ In addition, bad faith actors can benefit from the spread of mis- and disinformation to increase their financial gains. In the field of migration, mis- and disinformation is linked with hate speech and has the capacity to severely harm public opinion towards migration and lead to legitimisation of anti-migrant policies.

The increase in the number of immigrants in [Belgium](#) and in [Finland](#) in recent decades and increasing mis- and disinformation has enhanced Belgian and Finnish societies' concerns about migration.¹¹

[Randstad's study](#) shows that 60% of Belgians think that migrants cost more than they generate and 67% of Belgians think that the borders should be guarded more strictly.¹² 55% think that the asylum system is being abused, more than half of the respondents think that stricter actions against illegal migration must be taken, 52% think undocumented people should never be regularised, and lastly 56% defend the idea of guarding the internal EU borders of Belgium. On the other hand, 72% support family reunification but under strict conditions such as being integrated, learning the language, and being employed for at least 4 years. 60% of respondents are in favour of supporting migration to fill labour shortages, because employers in Belgium have been [struggling](#) to fill some vacancies.¹³ According to [De Stemming's](#) survey three quarters (76%) of Flemish people support the idea that non-European immigrants should adopt Belgian habits and culture as much as possible.¹⁴

A [progress report on migration](#) by the Finnish Government claims that “immigration is a more diverse phenomenon than public debate suggests and is essential for Finland’s economic dependency ratio.”¹⁵ The public debate often focuses on asylum seekers and quota refugees in particular, but immigration under international protection is only a small part of the overall picture at the national level. The most common reasons for moving to Finland are work, family and studies. In 2020, the Finnish Immigration Service granted a total of around 21 000 first residence permits in Finland. Moreover, the general attitude in Finland towards immigration is slightly more negative than in the rest of Europe, as shown in the [Demographic report in 2020](#) - yet the opinions seem to be [softening](#) toward work-related immigration.^{16 17}

The Ministry of Interior in Finland together with Taloustutkimus have created a tool called the Sentimentti data tool, which presents [data on people's sense of safety and security in Finland](#). In their [publication](#) on 05/2022, findings indicated a high level of trust in security authorities. Moreover, it indicated a more positive attitude towards migration and foreign assistance.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the results also state that:

- **38% of respondents say they are concerned about information influence:** 37% of men and 39% say they are concerned about information influence.
- 26% of respondents feel that immigration is a threat to Finland and Finnishness: 30% of men and 22% of women feel that immigration is a threat to Finland and Finnishness.

When looking at [more recent data](#)¹⁹, published 11/2022, there can be seen a slight change in the attitudes, for example:

- Compared to data given in the spring-term (above), **concerns toward immigration have risen slightly.** This is particularly because of Russia's ongoing actions in Ukraine. This has also influenced respondents' attitudes towards Russians residing in Finland: which was the case for 23% of people in May and now 32% of people in October.
- **Those living in rural areas are more concerned about the world's direction, their own economic status, and rising immigration.** Furthermore, individuals living in rural regions are more distrustful of international help and perceive the Immigration Service as a failure.

In Finland, as faced elsewhere in the Nordic-Baltic region, there have been narratives in public debate that are [intentionally influencing](#) conversations and public's understanding of the differences between refugees and migrants - and their roles in the society.²⁰

Based on the most recent events in Finland and in Belgium, we see a lot of mis- and disinformation²¹ affected by the infodemic that leads to misinterpretations about migration and immigrants. Furthermore, in a [research](#) made by Butcher and Neidhardt, they claim that mis- and disinformation about migration and immigrants show migrants as a threat to Europeans. According to their research; health, wealth, and identity are the most targeted frames by mis- and disinformation. Therefore, the main migration related mis- and disinformation themes in Belgium and Finland have been clustered in three groups: **A. Welfare System and Economy, B. Security, C. Culture and Identity.**

As discussed above, disinformation could easily and quickly spread through the internet and social media. Conducting fact checks may require more time and also they sometimes cannot reach the same volume of diffusion as disinformation could. There are several initiatives in Europe to reveal disinformation.

This paper is based on a small sample size; mainly using fact checking platforms EUvsDisinfo, factcheck.vlaanderen, Correctiv, AFP Fact-Checking, deCheckers, Faktabaari, NORDIS, EUFactcheck to find mis- and disinformation on migration in Belgium and Finland.

It must be mentioned that fact checking is a difficult task and requires more effort than spreading mis- and disinformation. Sometimes it may be too late to eliminate all the impact that mis- and disinformation causes. Also, it may be more difficult to spread fact checkings as fast as mis- and disinformation because they are not interesting or clickbait as mis- and disinformation are.

Mis- and disinformation could be classified differently according to different scales. While Wardle uses the seven different types of classification (figure 1), EU Fact Check classifies mis- and disinformation such as false, mostly false, mostly true, or true. So, there is not yet a universal scale of classification for mis- and disinformation.

Above, we gave a general introduction to mis- and disinformation. It was also observed how the issue of migration is affected by mis- and disinformation and its repercussions in Belgium and Finland. It was emphasised that three themes (A. Welfare System and Economy, B. Security, C. Culture and Identity) are the most affected areas by mis- and disinformation.

In the following sections, it will be focused on these themes in more depth by diversifying them with some examples from fact-checks and narratives. "Welfare System and Economy" will be the first theme that will be examined.

Theme 1 - Migration as a Threat to Welfare System and Economy

Migration and migrants suffer also from mis- and disinformation on public services and the welfare system. Under this topic, immigrants are shown as a burden on the economic system of the hosting country.

Migration and migrants are often the targets for misleading mis- and disinformation. In Finland, for example, there is recognised to be to certain narrative in which the native Finns are seen as [a different population](#) from immigrants. Also using the argument that "we", Finns, have been the builders of the welfare state and it should be

protected against “others”.²² In this sense, there may be a worry of “they coming here to use our society, and take something away from me.”²³ However, this is more often recognised among those who do not interact or engage with these “foreigners”. Most often the ideas are based on their own fear or false understanding as well as [lack of knowledge](#).²⁴ This type of occasions are mainly witnessed in counter media, anti-migrant far-right populists or in different social media platforms. This example will be presented in more detail below.

In the [Belgian context](#), migration stands as a significant demographic concern, with first-generation immigrants making up 16.5% of the population, and 13.7% having at least one migrant parent (second generation).²⁵ However, compared to other EU nations, Belgium faces challenges in effectively integrating immigrants into the labor market. Despite existing legal frameworks, people of foreign origin still encounter discrimination when seeking employment. While activation policies show greater success with native residents, targeted measures have proven more effective in enhancing labor market outcomes for immigrants. Regrettably, such targeted policies remain scarce in Belgium, and anti-discrimination measures tend to benefit EU migrants more than non-EU migrants.

Nonetheless, migration does have a positive impact on Belgium’s GDP. However, this contribution could be significantly increased, given the substantial influence of immigration on the country’s overall demographic situation. Some commentators even assert that Belgium is missing out on a significant economic opportunity due to its current approach to migration and integration.

Case 1 (Belgium) - Does migration really cost \$11 billion per year for Belgium?

Ik heb het even opgezocht (fedasil) de cijfers in mei 2021 tot dan zijn er 17000 mensen binnengekomen, meestal Syriërs en een 300 Congolezen . Er werken na verloop van tijd 20 % van alle asielzoekers (fedasil) dus kom me niet vertellen dat het geld opbrengt hè

[Translate Tweet](#)

Is de 11 miljard die de immigratie ons ieder jaar kost daarbij inbegrepen? Ik kan me niet herinneren dat jij daar ooit een aanmerking over gemaakt hebt.

[Translate Tweet](#)

10:57 PM · Jul 13, 2021 · Twitter Web App

A viral tweet in May 2021 claimed that asylum seekers cost Belgium €11 billion per year and that only 20% work. The data was not sourced, and official statistics contradicted these claims. In reality, only 1,634 asylum applications were made that May (vs. 17,000 claimed), and reliable employment data was unavailable. The €11 billion figure had no evidence base. In contrast, the National Bank of Belgium reported a 3.47% GDP increase partly due to immigration.

Disinformation Classification: Fabricated Content

Narrative Used: Migrants as an economic burden

Platform: Twitter

Fact-checked by: [Factcheck.Vlaanderen](#)

Purpose: To stigmatise migrants as fiscally harmful and exploit public concern over national budgets.

Case 2 (Finland) - False Allegation: Social Workers Trafficking Migrant Children for Money

A disinformation campaign targeting Arabic-speaking communities in Finland claimed that Finnish child protection authorities were kidnapping and trafficking migrant children. This narrative—spread across Nordic countries—was debunked by Faktabaari and tied to broader efforts to undermine trust in public institutions. In reality, the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health funded the LAMPE project to strengthen migrant-sensitive child protection services.

В Финляндии ко всем семьям относятся одинаково

21.9.2016 12:47 ПРЕСС-РЕЛИЗ



В российских СМИ периодически обсуждается практика применения в Финляндии мер защиты детей.

Вопреки высказываемым опасениям, в Финляндии не идет травля детей из иностранных семей. Финляндия является правовым государством, где действия органов власти основаны не на произволе, а на действующем законодательстве.

В Финляндии замещающая опека над ребенком или размещение ребенка на содержание и воспитание за пределы родительского дома не устанавливается ни по признаку гражданства, ни без соответствующего повода.

Disinformation Classification: Fabricated Content / Conspiracy Theory

Narrative Used: State as enemy of migrant families

Platform: Social media, ethnic community channels

Fact-checked by: [Faktabaari](#), [NORDIS](#)

Purpose: To erode trust in welfare institutions and fuel anti-government sentiment

To conclude, the given cases show that the Welfare System and Economy is one of the most affected themes in both countries. Either mis- and disinformation or narratives can be used to manipulate perception of societies against immigrants and migration.

Theme 2 - Migration as a Threat to Security

When discussing about immigration, there is polarisation within the population in Belgium and Finland. The fre-

quent debate focuses the division on “us” and “[them](#)”.²⁶ Furthermore, [countermedia](#)²⁷ (also known as alternative media) and right-wing populists have increased their use of these created “threats” such as “they” are coming to “our country,” “invading ‘our’ country,” and “[bringing instability](#)”, as well as rising levels of crime cases to benefit their political, economic, and/or personal goals.²⁸ Media find that their economic interests align with polarising content as it leads to more viewership²⁹, and therefore, more ad revenue.

Similar motivations can be seen as far back as the 16th century. For example, Evil May 1517, a date when Londoners violently rioted against Flemish, German, and Italian merchants and craftsman. These migrants were accused of “ruining the local economy and harassing women and girls.”³⁰ The Londoners were most likely threatened by the foreign merchants competing within their markets and rioted as a way of ridding London of said merchants. This is also a phenomenon recognised elsewhere in Europe as well.³¹

Polarisation of attitudes toward migrants, such as those towards Muslims, is an issue in Finland as it is elsewhere in the Nordic region and in Belgium.^{32 33} Referring to refugees as “radicalised”, they become the other, a [threat](#) to society.³⁴ The presence of Muslim immigrants in Belgium sometimes leads to a clash between cultures and this can lead to Islamophobia. For example, during celebrations after the last [World Cup](#)’s matches, Moroccan fans on the streets clashed with the police, Moroccan immigrants were shown as targets in the statements made by an extremist political party and this situation brought the integration problems in the country to the surface again.³⁵

For Belgium, the [22 March terror attacks](#) were the bloodiest terrorist attacks in its history.³⁶ On 22 March 2016, ISIS-affiliated terrorists attacked and killed 32 civilians. Two of the three bombing attacks took place in Zaventem International Airport and one took place in Maelbeek metro station which is very close to the European Commission and European Parliament alongside their working offices.

This terrorist attack has affected both the public zeitgeist and the political sphere of Belgium. Right-wing nationalist and populist parties have considerably [increased](#) their votes in the last decade in Belgium.³⁷ The results of the 2019 Parliament elections in Belgium prove that Vlaams Belang, the Flemish far-right party has increased its vote remarkably and have taken 11.95% of votes, gaining 18 seats in parliament, while they had 3.7% of the votes and just 3 seats in 2014.

After the 22 March attacks, an increased amount of mis- and disinformation was used to target Muslim communities in Belgium and spread false information about the terrorist attacks.

Case 3 (Belgium) - Disinformation: All Muslims Are Terrorists Exploiting Welfare

In a video distributed by a Russian media outlet shortly after the March 2016 Brussels terrorist attacks—and recirculated in far-right forums in 2023—it was claimed that Muslims are terrorists exploiting the welfare system by polygamy. The narrative falsely suggested Muslims used benefits to finance terrorism. No European country permits polygamous marriage, and the claim had no factual basis.

Disinformation Classification: Fabricated Content

Narrative Used: Muslim demographic threat / welfare abuse

Platform: Russian state media, online video platforms

Fact-checked by: [EUvsDisinfo](#)

Purpose: To vilify Muslims and fuel anti-immigration sentiment

Case 4 (Finland) - Unsubstantiated Claim: Migrants Rape Underage Schoolgirls

Following the 2015 migration wave, a recurring narrative spread on Finnish social media claimed that migrants rape underage schoolgirls. These claims were traced to pro-Kremlin disinformation sources and lacked credible evidence. The Finns Party and countermedia outlets amplified the message, creating fear and hostility toward migrants.

Disinformation Classification: Fabricated Content / Moral Panic

Narrative Used: Migrants as criminal threat

Platform: Alt-media, Facebook, Twitter

Fact-checked by: [EUvsDisinfo](#), [NORDIS](#)

Purpose: To instigate xenophobia and moral panic

Cases above show that mis- and disinformation and narratives are widely used to polarise societies against migration and immigration in both countries. Immigrants are shown as a threat to society, and this has a wider negative impact on integration policies and public support. This polarisation also may be seen in the Culture and Identity topics.

Theme 3 - Migration as a Threat to Culture and Identity

Immigration may uncover cultural differences between people. Many mis- and disinformation examples show us

that these cultural differences may be easily used to manipulate people and can create social problems. One of the most common themes in opinions that concern possible impacts of migration is [a danger to national identity and culture](#). The social impacts of it could include longings for a unified national culture or even seen as a danger to national identity.³⁸

Furthermore, culture and religion are often intertwined, and religious differences are seen as one of the main causes of cultural differences. Because the fact is that even an immigrant has the ability to learn the host language in a short time, it's very unlikely that immigrants convert their religion because it is seen as a kind of bond of the immigrant's ancestral culture and many of them barely want to lose that connection with their origins.

The increasing population of persons who have migration roots can be used in a misleading and manipulative way. Even those who are successfully integrated in the society might find themselves in various classification categories because of their migration roots, even if these immigrant roots go back several generations and these new generations describe themselves differently from their ancestors. As an example of disinformation about demography from [28/04/2019](#) has claimed that the majority of newborns in Brussels are from the Muslim community.³⁹ Even [Belgians think](#)⁴⁰ that the muslims make up 10% or even in some cases 60% of the Belgium population; in fact the Muslim community make up approximately [7% of the total Belgium](#)⁴¹ population, and 23% of Brussels. So those numbers are also fabricated, and such disinformation can lead people to believe that they are under threat. This can make it more difficult to implement integration policies.

Especially in the Nordics, the question of identity is strongly connected to the [questions of the welfare state](#). Normally this is seen, for example, through the idea that native population have “built” the system and immigrants would “[just come and enjoy the benefits without having the need to pay for taxes](#)”.⁴² Furthermore, accusations in the Cultural and Identity questions have been studied continuously, and according to a report prepared by the NATO Strategic Communication Centre of Excellence presents that several common narratives attacking different culture and identity attitudes have been created by Russian interference in the [aim of affecting public opinion](#) and understanding on different “threats” in the Baltic Region.

In addition, there is a strong division along identity and culture, for example, the Finnish identity is one of “[Euro-pean](#)”, “[white](#)”, “[Christian](#)”, “[intelligent](#)”, “[educated](#)”, “[civilised](#)”, and “[middle-class](#)”. In contrast to the qualities of Europeans, an example is presented about Syrians, in which case in 2015 they were portrayed as not meeting the same standards as “we” in Europe with our cultural and identity factors, instead they are being characterised as a threat.^{43 44} This means not meeting the same standards as we are holding of our culture, and therefore, anyone who does not fit our perspective are viewed as “[outsiders](#)”.⁴⁵

Case 5 (Finland) - Ukrainian vs. Muslim Refugees: Double Standards and Islamophobic Framing

During and after the continued influx of Ukrainian refugees (2023–2024), Finnish countermedia and online commentators increasingly pushed a narrative contrasting “deserving” Ukrainian refugees with “dangerous” Muslim refugees.

The implication was that the former are “European, civilised, and Christian,” while the latter are “uncivilised and destabilising.” These false dichotomies were found especially in platforms like WTF Media and Telegram channels aligned with the Finns Party.

Disinformation Classification: Misleading Content & False Context

Cultural Narrative Used: European identity vs. Islamic threat

Platform: Alt-media, Telegram, Facebook

Fact-checked by: NORDIS, Faktabaari

Purpose: To solidify cultural exclusion, racial profiling, and support anti-immigration political agendas.

Viewing the cases about identity and cultural differences can also be seen from the perspective of a theory of Orientalism. Here Westerners are viewed as different from the orientals, the “others”. The perspective separates differences in race, culture, history and society. Instead, “others” are opposite to Europeans which we recognise as “normal”, mature and rational to mention.⁴⁶ And these elements by highlighting opposing and unknown qualities of other cultures, some cases have been proven to use these and create false threats to be spread to the population.⁴⁷

Case 6 (Belgium) - False Claims of Muslim Majority Among Newborns in Brussels

A recurring disinformation campaign resurfaced in early 2023 claiming that “Muslim newborns are now the majority in Brussels.” This narrative was amplified through social media and far-right platforms aiming to frame demographic change as a cultural threat. However, demographic data contradicts this claim.

According to the Observatoire des Religions et de la Laïcité, Muslims make up about 23% of Brussels' population — not a majority, and certainly not 60% as alleged in the fabricated posts.

Disinformation Classification: Fabricated Content

Cultural Narrative Used: Islamisation and replacement theory

Platform: Facebook, Telegram

Fact-checked by: [EUvsDisinfo](#), Factcheck.Vlaanderen

Purpose: To provoke fear of identity loss among the native population and polarise public opinion.

As it is presented above, Cultural and Identical differences are used in a manipulative way by mis- and disinformation and narratives as it was also seen in the first and second theme. By using those kind of manipulations, the public's faith in integration policies is being undermined and it is emphasised that there is no common ground with migrants and that they pose a threat to the national existence.

Conclusion

The research conducted within the framework of the IMMUNE 2 INFODEMIC project clearly demonstrates that migration remains one of the most prominent and vulnerable themes exploited by mis- and disinformation in both Belgium and Finland. Across the domains of **economy**, **security**, and **cultural identity**, false or misleading narratives are used to manipulate public perception, polarise societies, and hinder evidence-based policymaking.

Mis- and Disinformation as Tools of Manipulation

Throughout the examined cases, actors ranging from individual social media users to political groups and foreign information operations have leveraged digital platforms to spread emotionally charged and misleading content. These narratives—such as migrants being a drain on welfare, a source of crime, or a threat to national culture—resonate strongly with public anxieties and are deliberately constructed to simplify complex migration realities into easily digestible but harmful stereotypes.

In Belgium, economic fears are amplified through false statistics on migration-related costs, while in Finland, state institutions such as child protection services have been targeted with conspiracy-laden accusations. Similarly, in both countries, Muslim communities have been framed as demographic threats or associated with terrorism, reinforcing exclusionary and Islamophobic attitudes.

Patterns and Purposes

The analysis reveals several recurring patterns:

- **Framing migrants as “others”** who undermine the cohesion, safety, and prosperity of the native population.
- **Fabrication of statistical or visual evidence** to support misleading claims (e.g. fake cost figures or misused protest images).
- **Polarisation through identity-based narratives**, especially around religion, gender roles, and national belonging.
- **Amplification by political and ideological actors**, both domestic (e.g. far-right parties) and foreign (e.g. Russian media networks).

These narratives are not merely misleading—they are corrosive. They erode trust in public institutions, justify exclusionary policies, and inhibit constructive public discourse around migration and integration.

Implications for Democratic Societies

Democratic societies depend on a well-informed public capable of engaging critically with information. Infodemics, especially when targeting sensitive topics like migration, compromise this foundation. They exacerbate social tensions, obstruct fact-based debate, and ultimately undermine democratic resilience.

In light of Finland's recent accession to NATO and Belgium's ongoing political fragmentation, the strategic use of disinformation around migration must also be viewed as a **hybrid threat**—not only a societal challenge but a matter of national and European security.

Moving Forward: Building Resilience

To counter these threats, the following measures should be prioritised:

- **Promoting digital and media literacy**, particularly among vulnerable demographics and youth.
- **Strengthening fact-checking mechanisms** and supporting independent journalism.
- **Enhancing cross-sector collaboration** between civil society, government, and tech platforms to monitor and respond to disinformation campaigns.

- **Encouraging inclusive narratives** that reflect the complexity and humanity of migration experiences.

As demonstrated through this research, tackling infodemics requires more than correcting falsehoods—it demands a proactive, structural response rooted in democratic values, social cohesion, and international cooperation.

References

- 1 Rothkopf, D. J. (2003, May 11). When the buzz bites back. The Washington Post. [When the Buzz Bites Back - The Washington Post](#)
- 2 World Health Organization. (2020, February 2). Novel Coronavirus(2019-nCoV) Situation Report - 13. Retrieved from [Novel Coronavirus \(2019-nCoV\) Situation Report](#)
- 3 Department of Global Communication. (2020, March 31). UN tackles “infodemic” of misinformation and cybercrime in covid-19 crisis. United Nations. [UN tackles ‘infodemic’ of misinformation and cybercrime in COVID-19 crisis | United Nations](#)
- 4 Infodemic. Cambridge Dictionary. (2023). [INFODEMIC | English meaning - Cambridge Dictionary](#)
- 5 Research guides: “Fake news,” Misinformation & disinformation: What is fake news? What is fake news? - “Fake News,” Misinformation & Disinformation - Research Guides at Temple University. (2023, July 15). [“Fake News,” Misinformation & Disinformation - Research Guides at Temple University](#)
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Wardle, C. (2017, February 16). Fake news. It’s complicated. First Draft. [Fake news. It’s complicated.](#)
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 International Organisation for Migration. (2021, December 01). World Migration Report 2022. [World Migration Report 2022](#) | IOM Publications Platform.
- 11 StatBel. (2023, June 8). Migrations. Statbel. [Migrations | Statbel](#) & Statistic Finland. (2023, May 24). Number of immigrations nearly 50,000 in 2022. Number of immigrations nearly 50,000 in 2022 - Statistics Finland. [Number of immigrations nearly 50,000 in 2022 - Statistics Finland](#)
- 12 Denys, Jays. (2022, September). Op zoek naar het maatschappelijk draagvlak voor migratie. [op zoek naar het maatschappelijk draagvlak voor migratie | Randstad](#)
- 13 The Brussels Times. (2022, September 5). Over 200 professions suffering staff shortages in Flanders. The Brussels Times. [Over 200 professions suffering staff shortages in Flanders](#)
- 14 Arnoudt, R. (2022, May 10). Drie op de Vier Vlamingen Willen Dat migranten onze cultuur overnemen en Taal Leren. vrtnws.be. [Drie op de vier Vlamingen willen dat migranten onze cultuur overnemen en taal leren | VRT NWS](#)
- 15 Ministry of the Interior. (2021, April 13). Suomen väestö monimuotoistuu – vaihtelua on alueittain. Valtioneuvosto. [Suomen väestö monimuotoistuu – vaihtelua on alueittain](#)
- 16 Väestöliitto ry, Väestöntutkimuslaitos. (2020). Kestävän väestönkehityksen Suomi. [Väestöliiton väestöpoliittinen raportti 2020](#)
- 17 Ministry of the Interior. (2021, April 13). This spring Finns are more communal and information-seeking - better sense of safety and security, but the global outlook gives cause for concern. https://intermin.fi/-/suomalaiset-ovat-tana-kevaa-na-yhteisollisempia-ja-tiedonhakuisempia-turvallisuuden-tunne-on-parempi-mutta-maailmanmeno-huolestuttaa?lang=ageld=en_US
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ministry of the Interior. (2022, November 24). Suomalaisten turvallisuuden tunne on kohonnut viime keväästä – tilanne maailmalla aiheuttaa kuitenkin huolta. Sisäministeriö. [Suomalaisten turvallisuuden tunne on kohonnut viime keväästä – tilanne maailmalla aiheuttaa kuitenkin huolta - Sisäministeriö](#)
- 20 EUvs.DisInfo. (2020, December 1). From Information Laundering To Influence Activities: Russia’s Footprints In Nordic-Baltic Countries. EUvsDisinfo. [From Information Laundering to Influence Activities: Russia’s footprints in Nordic-Baltic countries - EUvsDisinfo](#)
- 21 Butcher P., and Alberto-Horst Neidhardt. (2020, November 6). Fear and lying in the EU: Fighting disinformation on migration with alternative narratives. https://www.epc.eu/content/PDF/2020/Disinformation_on_Migration.pdf
- 22 Leino, M. (2021, November). Among friends and strangers: The Influence of Residential Context on Attitudes and Deliberation on Immigration. Painosalama. [Among friends and strangers: The influence of residential context on attitudes and deliberation on immigration - UTUPub](#)

- 23 Leino, M. (2021, November). Among friends and strangers: The Influence of Residential Context on Attitudes and Deliberation on Immigration. Painosalama. [Among friends and strangers: The influence of residential context on attitudes and deliberation on immigration - UTUPub](#)
- 24 Avonius, M. (2016, January). Kuka vastustaa maahanmuuttoa? Tilastollinen analyysi suomalaisten maahanmuuttovastaisia asenteita selittävästä tekijöistä. [Kuka vastustaa maahanmuuttoa? - Tilastollinen analyysi suomalaisten maahanmuuttovastaisia asenteita selittävästä tekijöistä](#)
- 25 EU Commission. (2020, November 1). The economic impact of immigration in Belgium. European Website on Integration. [The Economic Impact of Immigration in Belgium | European Website on Integration](#)
- 26 The Nato Strategic Communications Centre Of Excellence. (2018, January). Russia's Footprint In The Nordic - Baltic Information Environment. https://stratcomcoe.org/pdfs/?file=/publications/download/final_nb_report_14-03-2018.pdf?zoom=page-fit
- 27 Gwenaëlle, B., Pyrhönen, N. and Ylä-Anttila, T. (2019, December). Politicization of migration in the counter media style: A computational and qualitative analysis of populist discourse. [Discover, Context & Media, 32](#).
- 28 EUvs.DisInfo. (2020, December 1). From Information Laundering To Influence Activities: Russia's Footprints In Nordic-Baltic Countries. EUvsDisinfo. [From Information Laundering to Influence Activities: Russia's footprints in Nordic-Baltic countries - EUvsDisinfo](#)
- 29 Tuomola, S. & Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2022, April 13). Emotion Mobilisation through the Imagery of People in Finnish-Language Right-Wing Alternative Media. [Digital Journalism 2023, VOL 11, NO 1, 61-79](#).
- 30 De Koster, M., & Reinke, H. (2017). Migration as Crime, Migration and Crime. Crime, Histoire & Sociétés / Crime, History & Societies, 21(2), 63–76. Migration as Crime, [Migration and Crime](#)
- 31 EUfactcheck.eu. (2019, April 29). Mostly true: Asylum Seekers and Refugees area clearly over-presented in both sexual assault and aggression offences". <https://eufactcheck.eu/factcheck/mostly-true-asylum-seekers-and-refugees-are-clearly-over-represented-in-both-sexual-assaults-and-aggression-offences/>
- 32 Nordis. (2023, March 6). Misinformation about social services abducting children spreads across Nordic region, joint NORDIS investigation shows. [Nordishub.eu](#)
- 33 The Nato Strategic Communications Centre Of Excellence. (2018, January). Russia's Footprint In The Nordic.
- 34 Gwenaëlle, B., Pyrhönen, N. and Ylä-Anttila, T. (2019, December). Politicization of migration in the counter media style: A computational and qualitative analysis of populist discourse. [Discover, Context & Media, 32](#).
- 35 Biedermann, F. (2022, December 6). Belgium's burning resentment. The New European. [Belgium's burning resentment - The New European](#)
- 36 BBCNews. (2016, April 9). Brussels explosions: What we know about airport and Metro attacks. BBC News. [Brussels explosions: What we know about airport and metro attacks - BBC News](#)
- 37 BBCNews. (2019, November 13). Europe and right-wing nationalism: A country-by-country guide. BBC News. [Europe and right-wing nationalism: A country-by-country guide - BBC News](#)
- 38 Leino Mikko. (2021) Among Friends and Strangers. The Influence of Residential Context on Attitudes and Deliberation on Immigration. University of Turku. <https://www.utupub.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/152862/AnnalesB566Leino.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- 39 EUvs.DisInfo. (2019, April 28). The majority of newborns in Brussels are from the new Islamic community. EUvsDisinfo. [Disinfo: The majority of newborns in Brussels are from the new Islamic community](#)
- 40 Vews. (2018, May 18). Why is the number of Muslims in Belgium overestimated? [Pourquoi surestime-t-on le nombre de musulmans en Belgique? - rtbf.be](#)
- 41 Torrekens, C. (2018, March 30). Combien de Musulmans en Belgique ?. Observatoire des Religions et de la Laïcité. [Combien de musulmans en Belgique?](#)
- 42 Leino, M. (2021, November). Among Friends and Strangers. The Influence of Residential Context on Attitudes and Deliberation on Immigration. <https://www.utupub.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/152862/AnnalesB566Leino.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- 43 Conrad, M., Hålfdanarson, G., Michailidou, A., Galpin, C., & Pyrhönen, N. (2023). Europe in the age of post-truth politics: Populism, disinformation and the public sphere. Palgrave Macmillan, Springer Nature Switzerland.

- 44 Gwenaëlle B. (2022, June 21). (Good) Refugees Welcome! European Far-Right Responses to the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis. <https://liikkeessaylirajoen.fi/good-refugees-welcome-european-far-right-responses-to-the-ukrainian-refugee-crisis/>
- 45 Leino, M. (2021, November). Among Friends and Strangers. The Influence of Residential Context on Attitudes and Deliberation on Immigration. <https://www.utupub.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/152862/AnnalesB566Leino.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- 46 Said, E. (1979, October). Orientalism. Vintage Books edition. A Division of Random House, New York. https://monoskop.org/images/4/4e/Said_Edward_Orientalism_1979.pdf
- 47 Butcher P., and Neidhardt, A-H. (2020, November 6). Fear and lying in the EU: Fighting disinformation on migration with alternative narratives. https://www.epc.eu/content/PDF/2020/Disinformation_on_Migration.pdf