

EVENT DESCRIPTION SHEET

PROJECT	
Participant:	Participant 1 - FEDERAZIONE ITALIANA DIRITTI UMANI COMITATO ITALIANO HELSINKI ENTE DEL TERZO SETTORE (FIDU ETS)
PIC number:	897365334
Project name and acronym:	Media Literacy For Democracy — MLFD

EVENT DESCRIPTION	
Event number:	2
Event name:	MLFD Focus Group - Italy
Type:	3-day focus group
In situ/online:	In-situ
Location:	Italy, Rome
Date(s):	17, 20, 21 February 2023
Website(s) (if any):	https://fidu.it/language/en/media-literacy-for-democracy-cerv-programme/
Participants	
Female:	15
Male:	17
Non-binary:	/
From country 1 [Italy]:	32
Total number of participants:	32
	From total number of countries: 1
Description	
<i>Provide a short description of the event and its activities.</i>	
<p>FIDU conducted the Focus Group on February 17, 20 and 21 in-situ in Rome. The event had an educational, awareness-raising and dissemination function and represented an opportunity for citizens, incl. interested parties, to learn more about disinformation and media literacy as well as to exchange ideas.</p> <p>The Focus Group started with the introduction of the MLFD project and the previous activities, such as the MLFD booklet. The participants were then involved in different discussions on issues and concerns that revolve around the disinformation phenomenon, addressed from different perspectives. Each discussion was open by experts and facilitators, who stimulated the debate starting by case studies followed by questions.</p>	

The Focus Group was divided into three sessions covering different topics related to disinformation:

- **Session 1: *Disinformation and human rights*:** the impact on democratic processes and European values, the response of the European institutions and the role of civil society. In this session it was discussed the significant impact of disinformation on the EU. How it can undermine public trust in democratic institutions, fuel extremism and hate speech, and destabilise the political landscape.
- **Session 2: *Disinformation and media*:** Misinformation and disinformation in traditional, digital and social media, the response of journalism. In this session, it was discussed how disinformation campaigns can take many forms, including fake news, conspiracy theories, and propaganda and are spread through social media platforms and other online channels, making it easy for them to reach a wide audience quickly
- **Session 3: *Media literacy vs. disinformation*:** How to recognize fake news and become a fact-checker, how to take an active role in fighting disinformation and raise awareness of your community. In this session, it was discussed how media literacy can help citizens to fight disinformation, how to recognize fake news and disinformation operations, how to take an active role in fighting disinformation online and raise awareness of our community. How to support mainstream media while holding it accountable; and, how to keep citizens engaged in democratic processes were also points of debate in this session.

Participants:

The call for interest to gather the participants of the focus group has been shared through social networks, via emails (the promotion of the focus group has been sent to a minimum of 200 contacts incl. umbrella CSOs), and through a press release sent to Italian news agencies.

Participants came from different regions of Italy (incl. those where young citizens have fewer opportunities) and from different backgrounds, such as students, media workers, content creators, digital platforms experts, and legal professionals. The 3-day focus group involved a total of 32 participants, 25 of which aged between 18 and 35 (target group):

Country of residence: Italy

Average age: 25

Female: 15

Male: 17

Working language: Italy

Objectives:

By using the MLFD Booklet as a reference, the 3- day focus group allowed participants to grasp the main elements of disinformation, as to being able to recognise it when reading news and political speeches. After defining disinformation, the experts initially focused on the correlation between disinformation and human rights and how it hinders democratic processes. The following days were dedicated to understanding disinformation in different media outlets (from traditional ones to digital) and how media literacy can help the civil society as whole to recognise fake news and fight it by becoming fact-checkers. The limited number of participants allowed us to have rich and productive discussions, with attendees making several questions to experts. This event supported the achievement of the overall MLFD objective, which is to exchange ideas and best practices among citizens from different backgrounds and engage young citizens in the public debate on disinformation in the EU.

Results:

From the 3-day focus group, it emerged that, although the EU has taken some first steps to counter disinformation, there is more to be done to tackle this phenomenon, including: *increasing public awareness, media literacy in schools, and enforcing the regulation of social media platforms.*

The participants agreed that the EU must continue to work to ensure that its citizens can make informed decisions and that democratic institutions can remain resilient and strong against disinformation campaigns. Specifically, among the recommendations received:

- More education in schools about the disinformation phenomenon and its risk as well as media literacy notions for all young citizens.
- Developing fact-checking skills among citizens.
- Promoting activities and projects where institutions, media and civil society can work together.

- More activities related to the disinformation phenomenon to be promoted on social networks and television in order to reach the vulnerable groups who have fewer learning opportunities
- Facilitating access to more accurate information for everyone.
- Promoting pre-bunking strategies in order to prevent the spread of dis- and misinformation.
- Enhancing the participation of civil society in the policies promoted by the Institutions in order to have a more comprehensive approach.
- More targeted action and tools for community building in order to create specific action plans for different community groups.
- Strengthening the presence of the EU and promoting a better understanding of its policies especially in rural areas in order to tackle distrust in institutions which makes us more vulnerable to disinformation.

The number of questions that were posed by the participants showed that the level of engagement has been high throughout the whole event, highlighting a strong interest in this kind of topic. The reactions and comments of participants showed great engagement and interest in the future project activities.

Feedback:

Following the event, the participants were asked to fill a questionnaire for the final evaluation, which also included two specific questions related to the content covered in order to gather more input to be used for the international workshops.

As for the quality of both the organisation and the content of the focus group, participants rated it from “excellent” to “good”, and found the event useful for a fruitful discussion as different points of view were presented to stimulate engagement.