



# White book



## Rural Europeans' views on democracy and misinformation



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## Context

Misinformation has existed for centuries, but the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a sharp increase in its spread. According to Reuters, between January and March 2020, the number of English-language news items requesting the intervention of a fact-checker increased by 900%<sup>1</sup>. This exposure to false information has had a real and measurable impact on the health of European citizens. For example, according to a European Commission report on misinformation about COVID-19<sup>2</sup>, "the Belgian anti-poisons centre recorded a 15% increase in the number of incidents linked to the ingestion of bleach" during the pandemic. This situation has even given rise to a new term, "Infodemia", defined by the WHO as "an overabundance of information, some accurate, some not, which makes it difficult to find reliable sources of information and advice"<sup>3</sup>. What's more, despite regulations obliging social networking platforms to remove all disinformation content - regulations reinforced by the 2022 code of good practice against disinformation adopted by all the major sites - it is still very difficult to react quickly and effectively to the spread of false information. Today, the fight against disinformation is one of the European Union's main objectives. A 2021 report estimates that the phenomenon is "under surveillance, but not under control"<sup>4</sup>. A large number of citizens are therefore still exposed to it on a daily basis.

This explosion of misinformation is jeopardising European democracy. Fake news can have a lasting impact on voters, even influencing their decisions at the ballot box. This was the case, for example, with the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom. What's more, European democracy was already facing a major crisis, with the system of representative democracy being called into question. According to a report by the European Commission, this crisis is felt even more

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<sup>1</sup> "Types, sources, and claims of the COVID-19 misinformation", Reuters Institute, 2020

<sup>2</sup> "Combating misinformation about COVID-19", European Commission  
[https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/coronavirus-response/fighting-disinformation/tackling-coronavirus-disinformation\\_fr](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/coronavirus-response/fighting-disinformation/tackling-coronavirus-disinformation_fr)

<sup>3</sup> "Disinformation on the coronavirus - short assessment of the information environment", EEAS report, 2020

<sup>4</sup> "Misinformation about the EU: a phenomenon under surveillance but not under control", European Court of Auditors, *Special Report 09/2021*

acutely in rural areas<sup>5</sup>. In this document, we learn that citizens in rural areas are much more likely to vote for an anti-European party. Similarly, the economic decline is leading to an increase in the anti-EU vote in rural areas, unlike in other areas. These results are highlighted in the rural areas at the heart of the Rural Citizen Lab 4 EU project. In Puget Théniers, France, 37.61% of the votes cast in the 2019 European elections went to an anti-EU party. If we analyse abstention, it reaches extreme levels in Slovenia, with an abstention rate of 72.01% in 2019. In Romania, only 25% of young people took part in the last European elections. In Baena, Spain, even though voters abstained less than nationally, with a rate of 34.02% compared with 39.27% nationally, the figure remains high.

The divide between urban and rural areas is significant. A 2022 study called "Rural Urban Divide in Europe" (RUDE) quantifies this gap. For example, thanks to questionnaires distributed in several European countries, we know that 72% of French rural dwellers surveyed felt that the elites despised them, compared with only 39% of urban dwellers<sup>6</sup>. Similarly, 82% of the French rural residents surveyed felt that there were too many MPs from other areas who did not represent the interests of the people living in their area. This was the opinion of only 36% of the urban dwellers surveyed<sup>7</sup>. The COVID-19 crisis has accentuated this split, with the emergence of new practices, such as working from home or teleconsultation of doctors, which are less accessible to people living in rural areas.

Yet rural areas are a pillar of the European Union. They account for 83% of EU territory, are home to 30% of the European population, and are at the heart of the agricultural policy that enables us to feed ourselves<sup>8</sup>. The European Parliament has stated that it is aware of the growing dissatisfaction among rural citizens, who feel neither listened to nor helped with their problems<sup>9</sup>. The development of these areas is therefore a priority for the European institutions, in economic, social and civic terms.

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<sup>5</sup> "The urban-rural divide in anti-EU vote: Social, demographic and economic factors affecting the vote for parties opposed to European integration", European Commission, 2020

<sup>6</sup> "Rural Urban Divide Europe", Norface Network, 2022

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem

<sup>8</sup> "REPORT on a long-term vision for rural areas in the European Union - Towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040", European Parliament, 2022

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem

# The "Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values" programme

The European "Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values" programme aims to protect and promote the rights and values enshrined in the EU Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights. It was created in 2021 for a period of 7 years.

It is based on 4 pillars:

- Equality, rights and gender equality: promoting rights and initiatives to combat discrimination, including gender discrimination, and mainstreaming gender equality and discrimination issues;
- Citizen involvement and participation: to promote the involvement and active participation of citizens in the democratic life of the European Union and to raise awareness of European history;
- Daphné: combating violence, particularly gender-based violence and violence against children;
- EU values: protecting and promoting the values of the European Union, such as democracy, freedom and unity.

The CERV programme offers significant funding opportunities for civil society organisations at local, regional, national and transnational level to support democratic, inclusive and egalitarian societies and promote a European vision within civil society.

This project is funded by the CERV programme as part of the "Citizen engagement and participation" strand.

## Organisations involved

To carry out the project, five organisations from four different European countries joined forces.

### Foyer rural CEPAGE (France)

The Foyer rural CEPAGE is an association created in 1987 in Puget Théniers with the ambition of offering new services to the inhabitants and thus



contributing to the development of our rural territory. C.E.P.A.G.E is an acronym: C for Culture, E for Economy, P for Patrimoine (Heritage, in French), A for Activities, G.E. for Groupe d'Étude (Study Group, in French), which gives the organisation a broad field of activity, with each of these themes acting as a lever for development. Today, CEPAGE focuses on 3 areas: public services, including France Services and a social centre, Europe and training. CEPAGE's commitment to Europe is not new, since in 1995 it was awarded the "Carrefour rural européen Femme" label, then became Europe direct until 2021. Because Europe is a powerful lever for innovation, CEPAGE has been keen to set up several innovative Erasmus+ projects in the field of youth, as well as a LEADER rural development project. Today, it is coordinating the "Rural Citizen Lab 4 Eu" project in order to relay the voice of rural citizens to political decision-makers on the eve of the European elections. CEPAGE's European history continues to be written.

### DRPDNM (Slovenia)

DRPDNM (Association for Developing Voluntary Work Novo Mesto) is an organisation founded in 1992 in Novo Mesto, Slovenia. Its aim is to develop active individuals in an inclusive and open society, with a particular focus on social protection, culture and youth. It carries out a large number of European projects each year, with a total of 14,500 hours of voluntary work. Among other things, DRPDNM runs several reception centres for children and the Roma population. It organises a wide range of educational and recreational activities, giving young people a safe environment in which to develop their potential. The Rural Citizen Lab 4 EU project is a further milestone in their fieldwork in the rural area in which the organisation operates.

### CICIA (Romania)

Centrul de Incubare Creativ Inovativ de Afaceri (CICIA) has been a business incubator since 2003. CICIA's mission is to stimulate the sustainable development of local rural communities, businesses, institutions and organisations and to promote entrepreneurship among all people in the working age segment, in line with the policies promoted by the European Union in the equal opportunities sector. The organisation also carries out special actions for women and young entrepreneurs. It is a member of a large number of local, national and European networks: Local Committee for the Development of Social Partnership (CLDPS) of





Neamt County - North-East Region, Drumurile Bistritei Local Action Group (information activities for communities), Romanian Women's Lobby Association (member of the European Women's Lobby), European Network of Innovation for Inclusion... The organisation is also certified by the Romanian National Authority for Scientific Research to carry out research activities. Finally, CICI A has representatives on the Romanian Mountain Forum, the Mountain Commission of the Academy of Agricultural and Forestry Sciences, and research associates at the Centre for Mountain Economics of the National Institute for Economic Research of the Romanian Academy, making it a key player in its field.

### ADEGUA (Spain)

ADEGUA is an Andalusian rural development group in the form of a non-profit organisation with public interest status. It has brought together all the institutional, economic and social players in the Guadajoz and Campiña Este region, in the southern province of Cordoba, Spain, since 1996. Thanks to the projects it implements, managing European development funds in a participatory, bottom-up way using the EU's LEADER approach, ADEGUA has become an agent of innovation and change, key to the well-being of the population. Just two years after its creation, ADEGUA strengthened its European commitment by hosting the first rural information centre in Andalusia in the European Carrefour network, created and coordinated by the European Commission. Over the last 25 years, this European centre, which is now part of the Europe Direct network, has worked to bring the European Union closer to the people living in the rural areas of Cordoba. The Europe Direct Andalusia rural office has done this through communication, information and education activities and European projects, always encouraging participation and European awareness, the RCL4EU being a successful example of this.

### Maison de l'Europe de Montpellier (France)

Maison de l'Europe de Montpellier is an organisation set up in 1983 to promote the European vision in Montpellier, south of France. This mission takes the form of a wide range of activities, including edutainment activities in schools and universities, the organisation of conferences and festive events, training for local players in European dynamics, and information and guidance for anyone







with questions about the European Union. With a view to supporting and diversifying its activities in order to fulfil the association's main mission, since 2005 it has been awarded the EUROPE DIRECT label by the European Commission. As such, it acts as an information relay from the European Commission to the general public, and is the first point of access for the general public to the European institutions and, more broadly, to everything to do with Europe, in the Hérault and Aveyron regions. By getting involved in European projects such as the Rural Citizen Lab 4 EU project, the Maison de l'Europe in Montpellier is continuing its mission and seeking to raise awareness of the importance of the European Union.

## The project

Against this backdrop, these five organisations have joined forces, led by the Foyer rural CEPAGE, to create a project creating a space for citizens' discussions in rural areas.

To achieve this, round tables were organised in each of the countries involved. The Foyer rural CEPAGE, ADEGUA, CICIA and DRPDNM each organised two round tables in their area. These two events were aimed at different audiences. The first one took place in a school setting, and provided an opportunity to gather the opinions of young people in rural areas on disinformation and democracy, at both European and local levels. The second one was open to the general public, giving all citizens the opportunity to express their views and participate in the creation of a census of the views and ideas of people living in rural areas of the European Union.

In order to create a real forum for discussion and meetings, each organisation was represented at the round tables by at least 3 people from their local area.

All the information gathered at the various round tables has been compiled in this white paper. It will be presented at the project's final event in Montpellier, and is intended to launch a conversation about the needs of rural citizens with regard to their local, national and European governments.



What's more, the project has also helped to establish a new dynamic for cooperation between rural areas. A number of elected representatives from the areas involved were able to meet up and start discussions with a view to perpetuating relationships based on exchange and mutual support.

## Methodology

Throughout the Rural Citizen Lab 4 EU project, a bottom-up approach was used. In order to ensure that citizens could express themselves freely, we thought it best not to restrict what they could say by asking them to answer specific questions. Thanks to the World Café format, a facilitation technique used to create small-group debates in a dynamic format, the round table participants were able to express their visions and ideas without being constrained by a restrictive format. Organising a specific round table for secondary school students meant that they felt much more comfortable expressing themselves, surrounded by peers rather than older people. We also used interactive digital tools to bring together the opinions of many participants in an original way.

To ensure that the discussions were as inclusive as possible, we were careful to distribute the floor equally between the generations, genders and nationalities of the participants. A total of 616 people took part in the round tables. 57% of the participants were women. There was a wide range of qualifications and ages among the participants. In Puget-Théniers, for example, the youngest participant was 12 and the oldest 77. In addition, translators were present at all the round tables to ensure that everyone could express themselves in their own language without having to reduce the complexity of what they had to say.

Finally, we have collected all the opinions of citizens, without censorship and in complete transparency. This means that, as a result of this methodological choice, some observations may appear contradictory. They reflect differences between Europeans, and more often than not between generations. Some of the observations may also be false: the aim here is not to give only the true



information, but to draw up a picture of how the European rural population represents the subject of disinformation and democracy.

## Timeline

The first series of round tables took place in Baena, Spain, on 7 March 2023. For an entire morning, a debate in the form of a "World Café" involving more than 100 students (including 16 students collaborating as moderators and spokespersons) took place in the Baena public secondary school. Students from the IES Luis Carrillo de Sotomayor secondary school and 4 delegations from 3 countries were invited to share and debate their points of view and the ideas they might have for improving the situation. At the end of the afternoon, several students took part in the round-table discussion open to the general public to present their conclusions. Participants in this session also included representatives of the local council, civil society players (the director of the active participation centre for the elderly, teachers from other educational centres in the province, the president of the Baena Red Cross) and other local people, as well as the European delegations. The aim of this second part was to discuss some concrete proposals and actions, as well as to react to certain images using the photolanguage methodology. Using digital tools to create live polls and word clouds, participants were able to give their opinions in an innovative and dynamic way.

The second series of round tables took place in Puget-Théniers, France, on 28 and 30 March 2023 and 22 April 2023. On 28 and 30 March, a large number of round tables were held with 9 classes from 6ème to 3ème at the Auguste Blanqui secondary school in Puget-Théniers. A total of 225 pupils took part. The conversation was initiated using a moving debate technique: the young people had to position themselves in their classroom according to the reliability they gave to the information given by the moderators. This gave them the confidence to take part in the round tables. The round table open to the general public took place on 22 April. 48 citizens attended, and 8 nationalities were represented. This mix of experiences and opinions made for a very interesting debate, facilitated by the world café format, which enabled smaller groups to be formed, making it easier for everyone to participate.





The third phase took place in Roznov, Romania, on 29 September 2023. During the morning, all the project delegations were at the town's state secondary school to meet and talk with 60 pupils at a world café. Working in sub-groups to clarify the various issues surrounding disinformation and democracy, the young people were able to share their views and ask the members of the foreign delegations a wide range of questions. In the afternoon, the round table open to the general public was attended by 23 participants. It was chaired by a local journalist specialising in the subject of disinformation, who was able to share a wealth of knowledge and feedback with the participants.

The fourth and final round of round tables took place in Novo Mesto, Slovenia, on 15 and 16 November 2023. On the first day, all the foreign delegations met around 45 students from the Novo Mesto Biotechnology and Tourism Centre. Thanks to the world café format, the young people were able to meet and talk to a wide range of people. On the second day, the round table open to the general public brought together around a hundred Slovenian citizens to express their views on disinformation and European democracy. The event was moderated by journalist Nina Štampohar. Alongside her, a number of experts and guests gave their views and experiences on the subject of disinformation and its impact on democracy: Žana Erznožnik, deputy editor-in-chief of the online portal Razkrinkavanje.si, which identifies and categorises false information, Marja Kodre, representative of the Inštitut 8. marec, which is regularly targeted by disinformation techniques, Maria Moyano, a 17-year-old Spanish high school student who brought a youth perspective to the issue, and Mirjana Martinović, a long-standing journalist for the local media and point of contact for many NGOs.

On 13 March 2024, the project's closing event will be held in Montpellier, at the Lycée Jules Guesde, in the presence of local and European elected representatives from the various regions involved in the project. This White Paper will be presented to them and distributed at an event celebrating Europe.



# Results of the round tables

## Observations

This transcript brings together all the opinions and views of the European citizens interviewed at the round tables.

## Democracy

Although many participants in the round tables were critical of current democracy, they all agreed that democracy is extremely important for peace and freedom. Many pointed to the many dangers threatening it and expressed concern that it was gradually being eroded, and that they wanted to protect it. Although the European Union may have been criticised, its role in maintaining peace between European countries was deeply highlighted. The intergenerational dialogues helped to reinforce this conviction, with older people passing on to younger people their experiences of countries under dictatorship.

Populism and extremism are the main threats to democracy. The students found that, at their level, harassment can be a first step towards extremism. They are particularly vulnerable to it because of the anonymity provided by social networks.

In Slovenia, citizens (students and adults alike) have identified a tangible perception of corruption. Some feel that elections can be rigged or manipulated by the people who oversee their organisation and the vote count, and who have important links with the government in power. In this context, the benefits of electronic voting are under consideration. Its implementation, for example in Estonia, shows that it is possible for this system to be a success. However, it does pose a number of challenges, such as controlling the cyber attack on votes and bridging the divide with certain sections of the population who do not have access to or do not master IT tools.

Young people are essential to the development and preservation of democracy. However, at present, many of the young people we met do not feel listened to by their local, national and European governments. Not feeling

considered, they do not necessarily see the point of getting involved in civil society. In addition, many students explained that they did not feel sufficiently educated or confident about politics. Many blamed education (at school, but also at home, in their families), but some also admitted to having great difficulty making the link between political decisions and their daily lives. They don't see on a day-to-day basis what their government is doing for them (including at European level). What's more, they have few opportunities to talk about these subjects, as they prefer to avoid starting conversations with their family or friends that could get heated.

Similarly, many people, especially young people, do not realise the importance of living in a democracy. Indeed, thanks to the European Union, many have never experienced war or dictatorship. It is therefore sometimes difficult to broach the subject of the danger facing democracy, because it does not seem concrete or likely. However, the exchanges that took place during the project between these generations and those who lived through Franco's dictatorship in Spain or life in the USSR in Romania and Slovenia opened their eyes to this reality, and show how important it is to encourage this kind of encounter.

Many citizens also feel that they are not listened to or taken seriously, either by the media or by governments. On several occasions, it was mentioned that demonstrations to protest against government decisions were often denigrated by the media and political representatives, particularly in France, Slovenia and Spain.

Some citizens, often older this time, regret the decline in the quality of education at school, which they feel is no longer able to train the younger generation to be critical thinkers and committed citizens. In France in particular, a number of people have put forward the idea that the republican school has become fragmented and has lost its original meaning, i.e. as a place for training future citizens.

Many also highlighted the limits of representative democracy. The consensus among the participants was that, once elected, political decision-makers no longer listen to their citizens and decide in their place,



without taking account of their electoral promises. What's more, many people pointed to the fact that, more and more often, they are voting by default: not for the candidate who suits them, but for the "least worst". In the same vein, some people feel that it is unfair for someone elected with a small majority to be able to impose their ideas on a large number of citizens who do not support them.

The profile of elected representatives was also raised. Many regretted that political decision-makers are very often enarques, far removed from the realities of citizens. Their links with industrial and financial lobbies were also singled out, accentuating the feeling of mistrust towards governments in power.

## Disinformation

Misinformation is not a new phenomenon, and there are many examples throughout history where it has been used as a propaganda weapon by governments. Even history, as taught in schools, can contain an element of disinformation: it is written by the victors and often erases embarrassing or compromising events. In particular, the Spanish students highlighted the concept of the "black legend", a Manichean narrative of Spanish history that has conveyed many prejudices about its inhabitants.

Although misinformation has always existed, the development of new technologies has accentuated this phenomenon. It is increasingly easy to create and disseminate false information, thanks in particular to social networks and artificial intelligence. This can have a real effect on voters, as demonstrated by the outcome of the Brexit vote, for example. Software such as Photoshop allows photos to be altered to manipulate the truth, without it being possible to tell that the photo has been retouched. However, many citizens, particularly younger ones, have highlighted the importance of social networks as a space for free expression and opposition, particularly to governments in power, which is essential for a healthy democracy.

A young Russian woman, who attended the round-table discussion in Puget-Théniers, spoke of the importance of the internet and networks for young people in Russia. With the traditional media totally under Vladimir Putin's control,

social networks are often the only source of information that opposes the current government. Since the start of the war, they have been extremely tightly controlled and it is impossible to express oneself freely. Many sites are no longer accessible, unless you use a VPN. In this way, her testimony provided a counterweight to the majority opinion that social networks were a major vector of disinformation and were therefore fundamentally harmful.

It was also noted that, as parents buy their children tablets and mobile phones, they have access to the internet at an increasingly early age. As a result, they are exposed from an early age to numerous sources of information, which are not always controlled or verified.

However, young people are far from being the only ones spreading false information. A number of students and young participants also pointed out that, in their view, the older generations were more likely to believe what they saw on social networks or on applications such as WhatsApp. Younger people have grown up with these technologies and know from experience to be wary of what they see on the internet. Older people, on the other hand, don't necessarily know how these systems work, and will be more naive about the information that is shared with them, particularly by close friends and family. What's more, these generations cannot benefit from an enriched education programme at school, which makes the problem of raising awareness more complex.

The increase in the amount of information to which we have access also creates a feeling of weariness, overwhelm and even anxiety among many citizens. Recent events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have heightened these feelings, particularly among younger people. These days, it's difficult to separate the important information from the trivial. Every major event (war, natural disaster, etc.) is quickly replaced by another in the media and on social networks.

Young journalists also face many challenges. In particular, they are under a lot of pressure to produce articles that will get a lot of views on the networks, and they have to deal with a decline in public confidence in the traditional media. Against this backdrop, they are looking for mentoring and training.





The issue of media control was also raised several times. Opinions varied widely, but the consensus was that some form of control should be imposed to ensure that the media could not publish false information without sanction. However, many citizens were opposed to government control alone, for fear of interference.

Living in a rural area makes it even harder to understand information about the European Union, because the institution seems so remote. Its inhabitants don't necessarily understand how it works, or why it's useful. What's more, many farmers have difficulty with the EU's highly complex administration, particularly when it comes to applying for CAP subsidies. As a result, the EU does not always have a good reputation in farming circles.

Economic misinformation was also discussed. For many people, the concepts used, such as inflation, interest rates, etc., are complex concepts that they do not necessarily understand. People therefore often have the impression that banks, governments and big business in general are taking advantage of this lack of knowledge to manipulate the public. This is all the more perceptible with the data collected on the Internet, which makes it possible to target advertising and information sent according to a person's profile.

## Ideas

Faced with these observations, all the citizens consulted put forward numerous ideas for resolving the problems raised. In all cases, they stressed the importance of adopting a global approach, not a sectoral one: the role of the family, the school, social networks and the government all need to be included if we are to improve the situation. Here is an exhaustive list.

## Democracy

- Create control over online elections by means of a decentralised and impartial computer network that is resistant to intrusion and manipulation, while allowing real-time control by voters.



- Initiate conversations between political decision-makers and citizens on technological advances such as blockchains, which can influence the outcome of a vote.
- Include politics in other spheres of life, such as education or the family, to increase the number of opportunities, particularly for young people, to express themselves. These opportunities should take more dynamic forms, such as World Cafés, and be inclusive of all young people.
- Create conversations between political decision-makers and young people, using communication media adapted to this demographic, in particular social networks. These means of conversation must be vehicles for new ideas that are then promoted so that young people feel heard.
- Encourage governments to include the subject of the European Union in the school curriculum from a very early age, not only in terms of how it was built historically, but also in terms of how it works and the opportunities it brings to everyone.
- Increase funding for projects such as Rural Citizen Lab 4 EU or Erasmus+ projects, which have enabled many citizens to gain a concrete idea and experience of what the European Union is all about by meeting and exchanging with citizens from other countries.
- Encourage quality education by reducing class sizes and training teachers in new teaching methods.
- Reduce the legal voting age to 16, or even 14, in all Member States.
- Strengthen European legislation on algorithms and artificial intelligence, which are a threat to democracy.
- Promote a model of participatory democracy at all levels (local, national, European), by encouraging initiatives for citizen consultation and



expression. Representatives of the people could be present in every decision-making body.

- Create a system for citizens to monitor political decision-makers, so that elected representatives who fail to keep their promises can be punished.
- Limit terms of office to renew the profiles of political decision-makers.
- Increase transparency on the relations and interactions between political decision-makers and lobbies.
- Giving citizens easy access to government information, particularly on the use of the budget. Documents must be easy to access and understand.
- Create a unifying project that allows all citizens to feel involved, such as protecting the environment.
- Make voting compulsory by penalising citizens who fail to turn out to vote.

## Disinformation

- Promote websites that verify information so that they are better known by all citizens and become a benchmark in the field.
- Implement a filter system on the Internet that respects freedom of expression and pluralism, enabling better sorting of information to limit the feeling of fatigue and overwhelm among citizens faced with the multitude of information they receive in real time.
- Better training for journalists, particularly younger ones, to cope with the growing pressure to create content that generates a large number of views on the internet and thus ensure the production of quality, verified information.



- Encourage cooperation between political decision-makers at different levels, the media, fact-checkers and educational institutions.
- Develop a certified media outlet managed by a network of NGOs, and not by government sources that citizens do not always trust, to counter misinformation.
- Create legislation so that parents cannot buy their children tablets or mobile phones until they are at least teenagers.
- Encourage governments to make critical thinking education compulsory at school, from an early age, so that young people have the tools they need to filter what they see on the internet.
- Create an official platform to verify all information found on the internet, in which all national media would be obliged to participate.
- Set up training sessions for farmers in the different official languages of each country, so that they have fewer difficulties with the European administration, particularly when applying for aid.
- Delete the internet and social networks to prevent the spread of false information.
- Create a European institution specialising in education and awareness-raising about disinformation.
- Severely punish the perpetrators of false information through strict, unified European legislation.
- Set up intergenerational committees to reduce the gap between generations and enable an exchange of knowledge and experience.





## Broadcast

This white paper is intended to be distributed as widely as possible. It is to be distributed to all local elected representatives in the areas involved in the project, in France, Spain, Slovenia and Romania, as well as to European elected representatives. It will also be distributed to as many of the new MEPs elected in June 2024 as possible.

More than just an inventory of rural citizens across the European Union, this document should become a real support for legislators and political representatives, in rural areas or at European level. The high level of interest in this project has shown that the people who live in these areas want to be heard. By distributing this white paper, we are giving a voice to political decision-makers, who will be able to have all the information they need to make decisions in line with the needs and demands of their constituents.



# Resources and appendices

## Bibliography

### Reports

"Disinformation on the coronavirus - short assessment of the information environment", EEAS report, 2020

"Rural Urban Divide Europe", Norface Network, 2022

"Report on a long-term vision for rural areas in the European Union - Towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040, European Parliament, 2022

"Misinformation about the EU: a phenomenon under surveillance but not under control", European Court of Auditors, *Special Report 09/2021*

"The urban-rural divide in anti-EU vote: Social, demographic and economic factors affecting the vote for parties opposed to European integration", European Commission, 2020

"Combating misinformation about COVID-19", European Commission

### Article

"Types, sources, and claims of the COVID-19 misinformation", Reuters Institute, 2020

## Useful links

Facebook page for the project:

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100089736312863>

CERV programme website :

[https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/grants/2021-2027/citizens-equality-rights-and-values-cerv\\_fr](https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/grants/2021-2027/citizens-equality-rights-and-values-cerv_fr)

Website of the Foyer Rural CEPAGE: <https://www.foyer-rural-cepage.com>





ADEGUA website: <https://adegua.com>

DRPDNM website:

<http://www.criscoeuropa.eu/crisco-partners/contributing-partners/drpdnm-novo-mesto/>

Website of the Maison de l'Europe in Montpellier: <https://www.europelr.eu>

CICIA website: <https://www.cicia.nt.ro>





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