EUfactcheck: A pan-European project

Methodology and lessons learned

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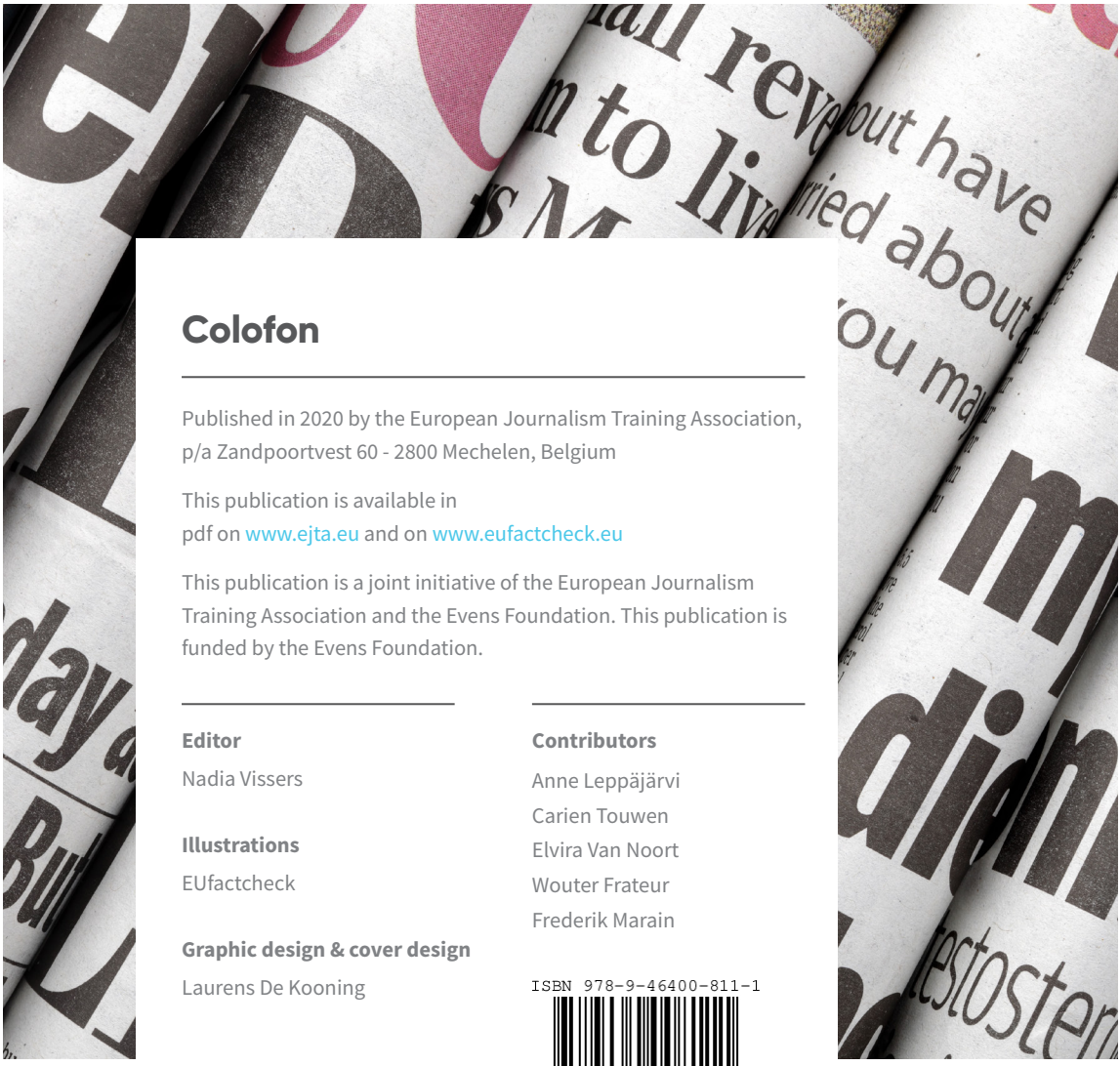

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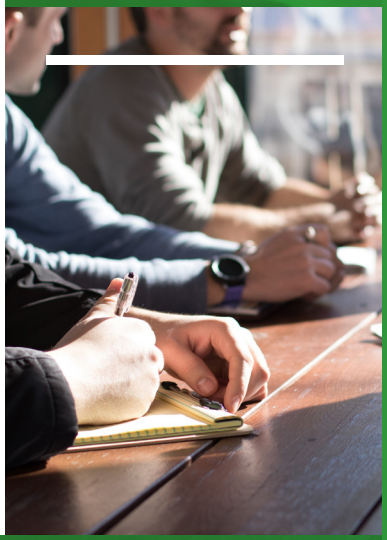
How to organise a multinational fact-checking project with a large group of journalism schools



Nico Drok
President EJTA

Introduction

Providing citizens with truthful information is the essence of professional journalism.

Society increasingly needs journalists that can act as beacons of reliability in the rising sea of unverified information and unfounded opinions. Most journalists subscribe to that. They see "opinion and false information on the internet" as by far the biggest problem for their profession.[1] In their influential book 'The Elements of Journalism' the authors Kovach and Rosenstiel argue that: "In the end, the discipline of verification is what separates journalism from entertainment, propaganda, fiction or art."

This has been true for decades, but in our so-called post-truth era it has become even more important.[2] The European Journalism Training Association (EJTA), an association of over 70 institutes for journalism education from more than 30 European countries, has acknowledged this. Members of EJTA educate or train their students from the principle that journalists should serve the public by clarifying and strengthening democracy at all levels, with reliable and relevant information. Following this principle, EJTA decided to launch a project called EUfactcheck. The aim of this project is to create a pan-European network of journalism schools with a sustainable curriculum unit on fact checking based on a common methodology. The project unites 20 schools from very diverse backgrounds to work together on one overall theme, on one platform, in one language, using one methodology. The focus of the project is on the educational and pedagogical aspects, not on trying to deliver a 24/7 fact-checking service. Therefore developing a common methodology and guidelines for journalism teachers and students is and has been the main task. This task was performed in continuous interaction and collaboration within the group of participants, supported by workshops and under the excellent supervision of a production team led by Nadia Vissers, the project coordinator.

The first theme of the EUfactcheck project has been the European elections of May 2019. This will not be the last theme. Evaluation of the project shows how fruitful and important cross-national cooperation is for students as well as teachers. In the years ahead, other schools will be invited to join this project, which has become a showcase of what collaboration on a pan-European level can look like.

1 The project in a nutshell

EUfactcheck is the fact-checking project of the European Journalism Training Association (EJTA), which intends to build a sustainable curriculum unit on fact checking in a European network of journalism schools, with a first empirical test phase and production period in the months before the European elections (January - May 2019) and with a common project report and didactic guidelines for dealing with misinformation as a tangible output.

The project aspires a far longer life-span after summer 2019, but this report describes the process and lessons learned until June 2019.

In the first period the project gathers 20 EJTA journalism schools that start with national fact-checking projects and modules for their students in order to cooperate for the project's peak: a European fact-checking network during EU Parliamentary elections in 2019.

Through fact checking European political claims and trying to tackle misinformation, the students and their public grow a deeper insight and interest in democratic processes, both on national and European level. The project focuses on teaching the basic, elementary skill of fact checking politicians' claims in mainstream and social media and contextualisation of EU politics (misinformation) rather than on debunking (automated) disinformation with technological tools and software.

This impartial network of journalism schools has the following tangible outcomes:

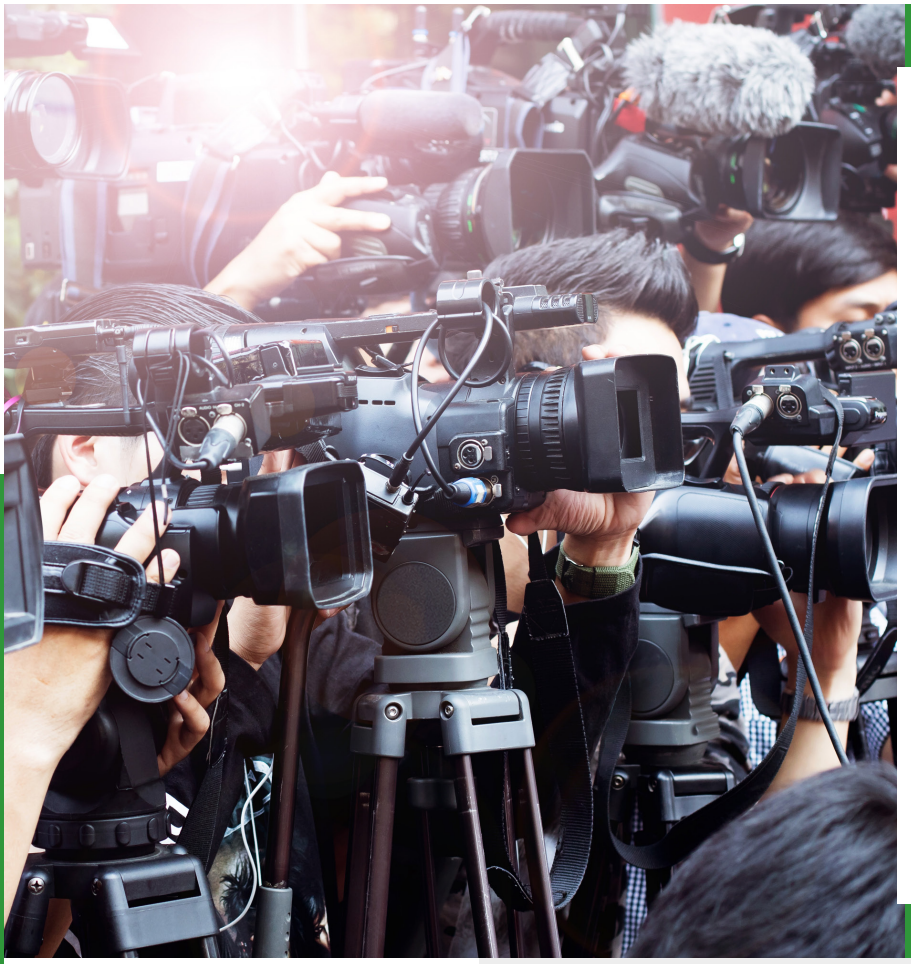
- **creation of similar, sustainable modules of fact checking within a diversity of European journalism institutes**
- **creation of a pan-European fact-checking portal: www.eufactcheck.eu**
- **online publications by journalism students: checks and blog posts, within a common format and with high quality standards**
- **organisation of train-the-trainer sessions during which coaches are trained in specific competences and skills in order to teach their students**
- **production of guidelines for journalism staff with lessons learned (during the first production phase) and best practices, based on a newly developed flowchart for fact checking**

EUfactcheck's desired impact is to improve the quality of journalism through education and to foster the fact-based public debate, thus contributing to the growth of democratic awareness by EU voters. A unique surplus is that the project is run for and by young European citizens without partiality.

Because EJTA is the glue of this pan-European project, all activities are organised simultaneously with an EJTA conference or on an EJTA school location. That way it is also possible to efficiently reach different staff of EUfactcheck without huge costs.

The EUfactcheck schools all want to work on the following main objectives:

- to support quality journalism and journalism education
- to enhance media literacy within future journalists and their public
- to train journalism students in the latest fact-checking techniques and tools
- to scrutinise the accuracy of European political statements and their presentation in the media in order to enhance a more fact-based public debate



2 Project management

in (fact-checking) projects with journalism students

With neither high academic aspirations nor in-depth research grounds, a quick online search into existing multinational projects with journalism students shows that a project like EUfactcheck is very rare and probably even unique in its structure, size and approach. That is why we hope these guidelines might offer valuable key tips to other similar journalism education initiatives and educational networks that might be looking to create collaborative fact-checking projects.

Cooperation between journalism schools

Although we notice lots of examples of valuable cooperations between journalists and journalism students, no direct cooperation between different journalism schools and their respective staff is immediately visible. Certainly not at the scale of EUfactcheck: 20 journalism institutes from 14 different European countries, or with such a small project budget.

Of course there are multiple illustrations of cooperation on the level of higher education (e.g. Erasmus+ projects, Horizon 2020 projects, Council of Europe projects, etc.) and between journalists in cross-border projects, but no project that focuses on joint curriculum development within so many journalism schools is known to us. Moreover, international cooperation between journalism educators is often an initiative by American universities (e.g. High School Journalism Initiative[3], The Campus Consortium[4]) and seems to be a rarity in the rest of the world. When an initiative from another continent is being developed, it is seldomly focusing on 'continental' political statements as is the case in EUfactcheck (e.g. 'Journalism in a Global Context'[5] (JiGC): an African-European project aimed at connecting journalists and journalism students in Africa and Europe, promoting the quality of foreign reporting in Europe and Africa). The last five years, a large amount of valuable and inspiring courses for and reports about verification, fact checking or debunking are created or commissioned by the Poynter Institute's IFCN[6], the Council of Europe[7], Unesco[8], Full Fact[9], First Draft[10], the Reuters Institute[11] etc., but not really one multinational collaborative project has evolved, using the same methodology in practice.

Cross-national fact-checking initiatives

On the other hand, there do seem to be quite some initiatives that cover the same topic and approach as EUfactcheck, such as the International Press Institute reporting project 'Contending with "Fake News"[12], which explores the dynamics around the "fake news" debate in five EU countries and profiles five initiatives that have adopted innovative solutions to addressing disinformation and building trust in fact-based journalism. Yet again, this is about five isolated initiatives and not 20 cooperating participants. Another project focusing on fact checking during the European elections is the IFCN project FactCheckEU[13], which brings together 19 European media outlets from 13 countries to counter misinformation in the EU at a continental scale. However, this is a project for journalists only and does not involve journalism students.

As such, EUfactcheck seems to be a unique and very specific project in context and in size. Nevertheless, apart from the expertise we gained from FullFact, Polifact, Truly Media, the EU High Level Group on Fake News, Journalism Trust Initiative and so many other great initiatives, we do want to give credit to some fact-checking projects that were truly a source of inspiration:

Electionland[14]

A huge collaborative journalism project led by non-profit news organisation ProPublica that employed technology and data to track problems during the 2016 United States presidential elections and 2018 midterm elections. Professors of participating journalism schools were responsible for cascading the training they received during Bootcamp to the participating students. EUfactcheck was certainly influenced and inspired by the lessons learned and the lists of literature and tools used in their project description.

CrossCheck France[15]

The multidimensional collaboration during the 2017 French presidential elections, between journalists from France and the UK, and 10 journalism students was of huge importance to us. This project format has been copied to many different countries now (CrossCheck International[16]) and CrossCheck Europe was intended to take place during the European elections, leaving room for collaboration with EUfactcheck students. Due to time scarcity and difference in target groups, the collaboration never became concrete. EUfactcheck received valuable input and help from CrossCheck during the Utrecht Bootcamp and EUfactcheck students went to CrossCheck summits.

Lessons learned

The first basic but important takeaways about project management we learned from these projects are:

- Use flexible workflows.
- Plan the flow of publications well.
- Use tight deadlines.
- Create the possibility for different approaches to fact checking.
- Horizontal communication is important.
- Use one language.

3 Project history

3.1 Spring 2015 – winter 2018

In order to understand the successes and the smooth collaboration between participants of this multinational fact-checking project it is important to outline its history and the gradual growth and acceptance of the decisions made.

At the 25th anniversary of the association in May 2015, EJTA decided to take a Finnish fact-checking project (between fact-checking service Faktabaari and journalism students from Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences) to an international level. With the European Parliamentary elections as an empirical test case, a pedagogical project would be set up to create a common methodology for fact checking in order to foster a fact-based debate about the EU during the elections. In summer 2016 EJTA schools were contacted and asked to sign a Letter of Commitment (see Appendix 1). A kick-off meeting was organised in Paris (October 2016) during which the first 14 participants from 10 countries showed their willingness to take the research courses in their journalism curriculum to the level of fully credited fact-checking modules.

From the very beginning, all participants believed in an international network of journalism schools that would check factual mistakes and political statements about EU in mainstream media with a commonly developed methodology on an open platform. During the first meetings it became clear that the overall question was not why or how these mistakes were being made but how the future generation of journalists should try to detect and rectify them. Questions and approaches about facts and factuality, peer learning and coaching, criteria for monitoring, selecting, checking and publishing, claims and their checkability, objective networks of experts versus lobbies, which data software and technological tools to use, use of social media for journalistic goals, ethics, transparency, public access of documents etc. were being discussed. All participants presented their own know-how and the fact-checking initiatives in their schools and small pilots started on national basis (e.g. in Finland, France, the UK, Belgium and the Netherlands).

Takeaways

- **Make sure participants show commitment in an official way from the very first meeting onwards (with a signed Letter of Commitment).**
- **Each participating school should nominate one responsible contact person.**
- **Participants should be actively involved in the main project on all levels and take their own responsibility for their curriculum course.**
- **Participating staff should be involved in the educational courses (preferably in research or fact checking) at their home institutes.**

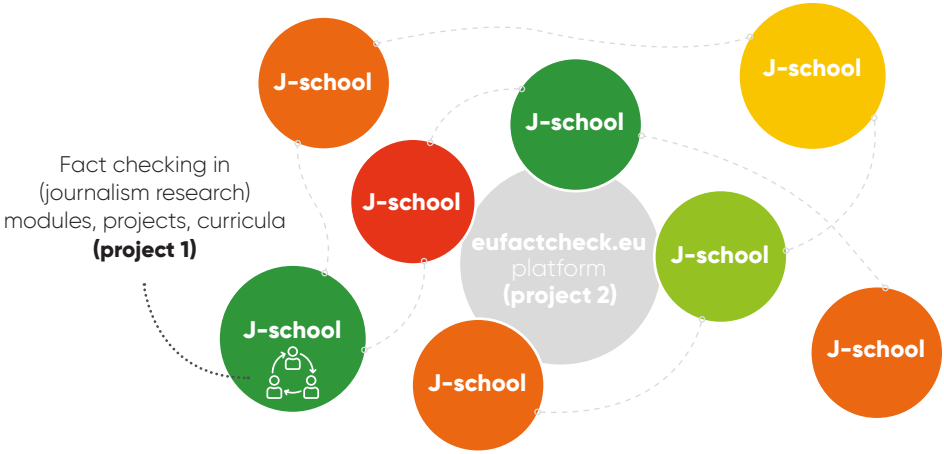


Fig. 1: Relation fact-checking modules in journalism schools (J-schools) on national level vs EUfactcheck

After these first meetings and decisions, two train-the-trainer workshops provided all commonly created input necessary for participants to start developing or elaborating their curriculum unit, based upon different (inter)national lessons learned. These guidelines would be followed by the journalism coaches and students for the input on the multinational website. Throughout several questionnaires *(December 2017, February 2018 and June 2018)* the final decisions on the character of the claims, facts, tools and output were taken and as such we developed fact-checking guidelines.

Within the project a production team with staff from three EJTA schools (Artesis Plantijn University College Antwerp, Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences Helsinki and Utrecht University of Applied Sciences) came into existence and EJTA engaged a project coordinator.

Takeaways

- **Project management should work bottom-up with input from the participants being synthesised by a coordinator and a production team.**
- **A small production team, with clearly set tasks is indispensable.**
- **Work with ONE responsible contact person per participating school.**

The tangible core of the project was set in 2018 when two production team members created a unique and specific fact-checking instrument: a fact check flowchart (downloadable at www.eufactcheck.eu and see Appendix 2). This is the EUfactcheck educational tool for all analytic steps in the fact-checking flow to be taken by journalism students. (Detailed description of the flowchart: see part II, chapter 2.4.)

At the same time the publication platform, housestyle and project communication strategy were developed. The production team created story formats and publication schedules for the pan-European newsroom and decided on clear communication channels.

Again, all steps and guidelines (e.g. status of the flowchart, site architecture, branding, roles and responsibilities, format and criteria for fact checks and blog stories, internal and external communication, social media strategy, timing, …) were decided by simple majority in questionnaires and during meetings. In autumn 2018 the website www.eufactcheck.eu was launched and presented to all EJTA members.

Takeaways

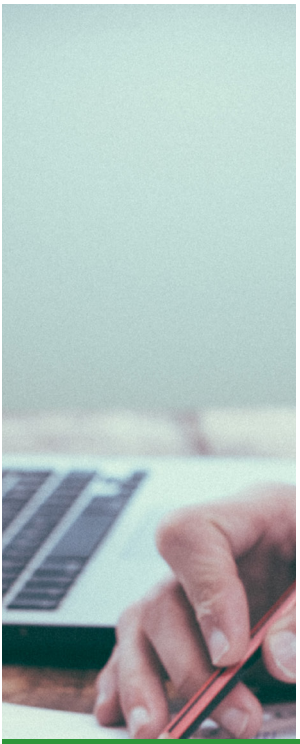
- **Keep involving all participants in the main steps and decisions of the project; this strengthens all participants' feelings of ownership.**
- **Questionnaires with short questions that require simple answers before clear deadlines are an easy way to take decisions.**
- **Announce that a simple majority (50 % of the respondents) will decide.**
- **Announce that not answering to the questions is considered to be silent agreement.**
- **In order to develop a multinational project, it is very important to have a clear project design with project-proof tools (platform, publication, communication) and organisation.**

The illustration of the project's timeline is to be found here: the rough timing of the main preparation phases and realisations of EUfactcheck (spring 2017-winter 2018). To give a more complete overview, we also add the timing of the first publication phases (2019) and the future developments (2020).

The implementation of the developed methodology and production process in 2019 and the steps afterwards will be elaborately described in the following chapters.

05/2017	Kick-off (Munich, day before EJTA AGM)
10/2017	Train-the-trainer workshop 1 (Moscow, day before EJTA Teachers' Conference 2017, 25 participants)
01/2018	Start national fact-checking projects in EJTA journalism schools
05/2018	Train-the-trainer workshop 2 (Barcelona, day before EJTA AGM 2018, 25 participants)
10/2018	Launch eufactcheck.eu + preparatory meeting (Thessaloniki, day before EJTA Teachers' Conference 2018, 25 participants)
01/2019	Start publication on pan-European platform www.eufactcheck.eu
01/2019 (24-25)	Bootcamp Utrecht (35 participants)
02-06/2019	Project runs simultaneously in 20 journalism schools
07/2019	Dissemination of the project on WJEC5 Paris (9-11/07/2019: http://www.wjec.paris)
10/2019	Dissemination and discussion future on EJTA Teachers' Conference 2019 (Technische Universität Dortmund, Germany, 17-18 October 2019)
Autumn 2019	Publications on pan-European platform www.eufactcheck.eu
Winter 2019	Wrap-up and evaluation 2019; finalisation of future plans in 2020 Preparation of train-the-trainer workshop in (Central) Eastern Europe and production of guidelines
02/2020	Launch of the EUfactcheck guidelines
02/2020 (13-14)	Train-the-trainer workshop in Ljublana, focus on Central and Eastern European countries (CEE)

Fig. 2: Timeline of EUfactcheck between May 2017 and May 2020

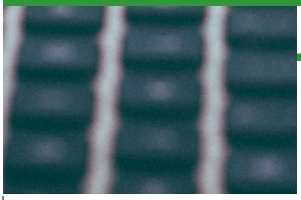


3.2 Funding & visibility

Several project applications within the European Commission (Erasmus+, Europe for Citizens, Jean Monnet) didn't prove to be successful because of our project structure or non-academic level and the consortium decided not to go for funding from major media platforms such as Google Digital News Initiative. In 2018 we could rely on a small amount for the website and its architecture from the Council of Europe. The decision to keep project meetings one day before official EJTA meetings and the possibility for several participating schools to use Erasmus+ Staff Mobility funding kept the costs low.

Takeaways

- **If no huge funding 'machinery' is involved, impartiality and flexibility are assured. Administration can be simple and straightforward.**
- **The lack of substantial external funding kept the project design more open-end and made the commitment of participants more sustainable and flexible than in fixed, funded projects. E.g.: schools had the opportunity to redefine their roles during different levels of the project.**
- **When participants are made responsible for their own funding they feel more involved.**
- **A project like this (without substantial funding) is only possible if the network already exists and if you can combine project meetings with other network activities.**



The project gained visibility at conferences (E.g. Future of Journalism Conference 2017 at Cardiff University[17], Conferences of FEJS[18], Global Fact 2018[19]), international meetings (Worldforum for Democracy CoE October 2017[20], International Journalism Festival in Perugia 2017-2018-2019[21], European Parliamentary Conference for Fact Checkers September 2018[22]…), fact-checking organisations (IFCN, CrossCheck, …) and through several national platforms, conferences and media in the participating schools' countries.

Communication and intentions to cooperate with FirstDraft, CrossCheck, European Data Journalism Network, Dig Deeper Media, EU Disinfolab and other organisations grew rapidly.

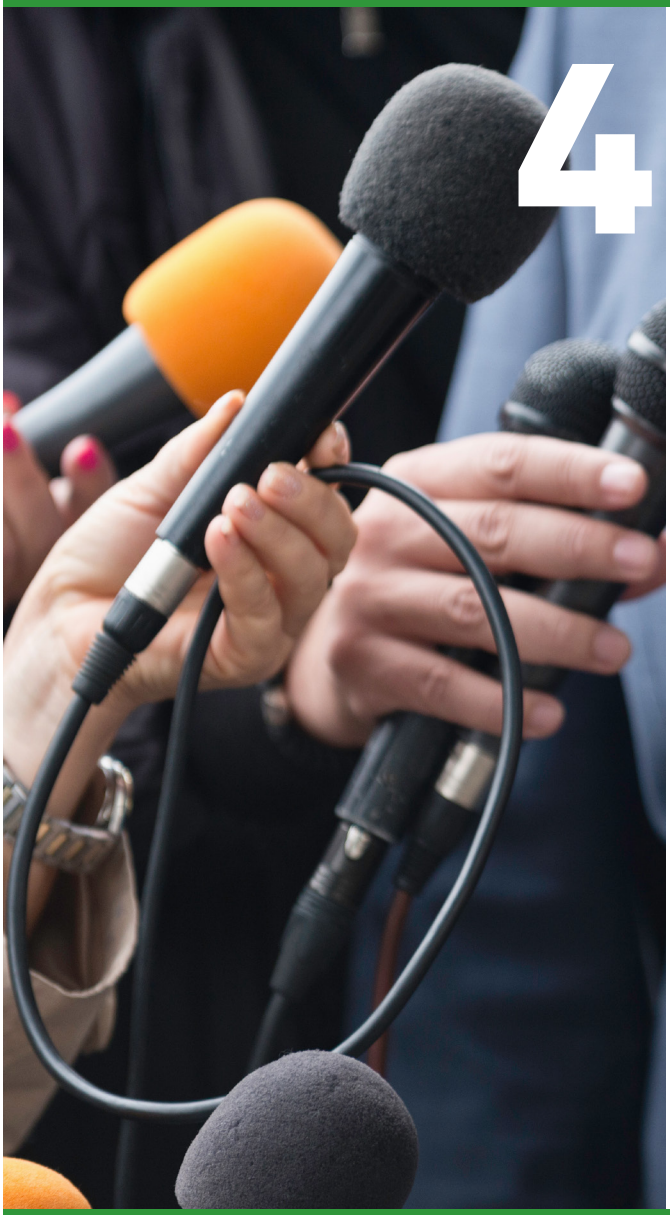
3.3 Participants

The project started with 14 participants and grew organically in number during different EJTA meetings. Participation was on voluntary basis and we tried to strive for regional diversity within Europe, but that was not our main prerequisite. Some schools decided before the production phase that they couldn't find the staff or time to commit with enough quality to the project: participants from Ireland and the UK unfortunately left the project. Other schools decided to step in at a later moment: e.g. the participants from Croatia and Russia.

Participants could decide to work within their own possibilities and publish at their own speed in different tracks: easy-going, medium and fast (more details in chapter 4.1.6). It is interesting to notice that the transnational network also includes non-EU partners (Georgia and Russia) which function as external monitors.

Country	EJTA member
Austria	FH Wien der WKW, Institut für Journalismus & Mediamanagement
Belgium	Artesis Plantijn University College
	Artvelde University College
	Thomas More University College
Croatia	University of Zagreb
Denmark	Danish School of Media and Journalism
Finland	Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences
France	l'Institut Pratique du Journalisme de Paris-Dauphine
Georgia	Caucasus School of Journalism & Media Management
	University of Georgia
Germany	Hochschule der Medien Stuttgart
Greece	Aristotle University, School of Journalism & Mass Communication
Italy	Catholic University of Milan
Russia	South Ural State University
Spain	University Pompeu Fabra Barcelona
Sweden	Fojo Media Institute
	Linneaus University, Institution for Media and Journalism
The Netherlands	Utrecht Applied Sciences University, Institute for Media
	Windesheim University of Applied Sciences
	Fontys University of Applied Sciences

Fig. 3: EUfactcheck participants during the publication period of January – June 2019

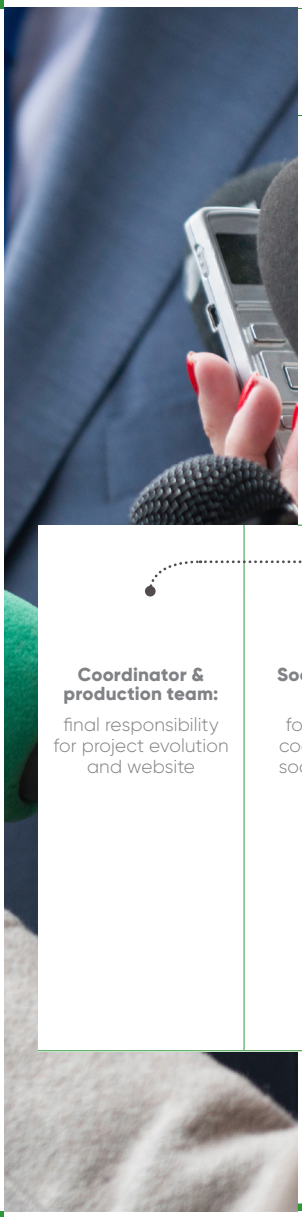


4 Concrete project: January - June 2019

4.1 Project management

4.1.1 General management

It was immediately obvious we should work with different teams and diverse workflows, in order to be able to coordinate the journalistic productions originating from 20 journalism schools. On the next page you can find an overview of the general roles and responsibilities for the different stakeholders, starting with the students.



Journalism students	• publish fact checks and blog posts + social media posts • use of resources from Google Drive • follow formats and styleguide strictly
Responsible editor/student	• first check-up and follow-up of publication by (fellow-)students • follow-up of social media
Staff / national coach:	• responsible for content and form of final publications on www.eufactcheck.eu • follow deadlines publication schedule: fact checks, blog posts and visualisations • communicate with social media, visualisation and website team • communicate with coordinator and production team • coach input students • final responsibility for publications of own students • coordinate participation in CrossCheck • IT help for students • Wordpress role= author

Coordinator & production team:	**Social media team**	**Visualisation team**	**Website team**
final responsibility for project evolution and website	follow-up + coordination social media	production of visuals and graphics following orders of participants	• overall coordination and communication webmaster • communication with teams • webmanagement • communication with and between participants • IT-helpdesk for staff • external communication • Wordpress role = administrator • monitoring publications • monitoring website • follow-up of info mailbox (info@eufactcheck.eu)

Fig. 4: Roles and responsibilities within EUfactcheck

4.1.2 Workflow coordinator and production team

We created a production team to coordinate the publications and take final decisions on content and communication and three more teams, each with very specific tasks. Each team's roles and responsibilities were discussed during premeetings and were divided and fulfilled on voluntary basis. Only the coordinator was appointed by EJTA.

Coordinator and production team:

- final responsibility for project evolution and website
- overall coordination & communication
- communication with teams
- communication with and between participants
- external communication
- Wordpress role = administrator
- monitoring publications
- monitoring website
- follow-up info mailbox (info@eufactcheck.eu).

Within the production team detailed agreements about specific tasks were made. Below one example 'what to do when being in charge of the website monitoring':

- *You're in charge during your two weeks, but you should communicate with the other production team members.*
- *In discussions that are complicated and need a final decision: do consult the coordinator (in order not to waste too much time, she'll decide if necessary).*
- *After publication of a new item: complete the publication schedule.*
- *In publications: only change obvious spelling errors and important language mistakes yourself.*
- *Contact the participant that published individually via Slack to mention errors or ask for changes or explanation (about graphs etc.).*
- *Don't start changing the content (not clear, mistakes, …): ask the author / participant to do that and ask them to send a message to you when the changes are done.*
- *After you changed / corrected the check or blog: contact the author individually on Slack.*
- *Go to #general for general remarks.*

The production team agreed upon a very clear and thus feasible timing for monitoring the website during publication weeks. This timing was included in the complete publication schedule (see chapter 4.1.6).

w 1-2	Wouter + Nadia
w 3-4	Elvira + Frederik
w 5-6	Carien + Anne
w 7-8	Elvira + Frederik
w 9-10	Wouter + Nadia
w 11-12	Carien + Anne
w 13-14	Elvira + Frederik + Wouter
w 15-16	Carien + Anne + Nadia

Fig. 5: Who's monitoring the website?

How do you rate the assistance of the production team (Nadia, Carien, Elvira, Anne, Wouter, Frederik) during the project?

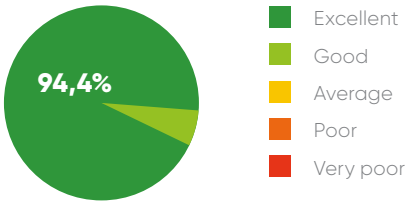


Fig. 6: Question from Output Report (May 2019)

The production team evaluated and adapted their tasks weekly during the publication period and communicated on a nearly daily basis with each other. In order to monitor their own functioning and to have an overall view on the process, they wrote track records (more details in chapter 4.2.3) and created Slack meetings. These didn't only serve the purpose of communication with the participants but were also used as general management tools: fixed moments for the production team to sum up the current state of affairs, to redefine the agreements made and to implement changes when necessary.

Takeaways

- **Try to organise a swift and flexible production team that can communicate on an easy basis, both live and online.**
- **But still allow a reasonable span of time for responses, keep the 'sense of urgency' bearable.**
- **Divide the tasks, certainly when you're working with volunteers.**
- **Be flexible in accepting that the responsibilities and roles will change during the project and that the process of change might take some time from participants and team members.**
- **Communicate with the production team on fixed intervals about general remarks, do's and don't's, roles and responsibilities, and give and accept advice to and from each other.**

4.1.3 Workflow website team

Within the website team it is important to make a difference between the webmaster who controls the architecture and strategy of the site and the helpdesk who monitors and helps with the content of the publications.

Responsible staff / coaches of journalism schools

- = staff with Wordpress login
- IT helpdesk for students
- editor-in-chief for publications on website
- check all regulations and agreements concerning formats, styleguide, copyright, …
- Wordpress role= author

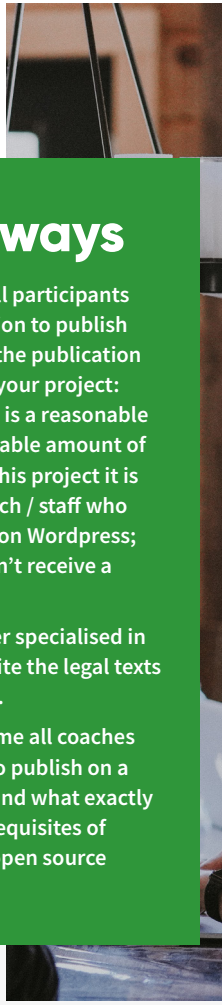
Vice webmaster

- follow-up of posts / questions from the public on the website 'Suggest a fact check'
- follow-up of IT problems
- IT helpdesk for staff
- Wordpress role= administrator

Webmaster

- responsible for ALL final decisions concerning site architecture, IT methodology and procedures, legal issues of the website, …
- follow-up of IT problems
- IT helpdesk for staff
- Wordpress role= administrator

Fig. 7: Roles and responsibilities of the website team



Takeaways

- **Don't give all participants the permission to publish or log in on the publication platform of your project: make sure it is a reasonable and controllable amount of people. (In this project it is only the coach / staff who can publish on Wordpress; students don't receive a login).**
- **Find a lawyer specialised in media to write the legal texts for your site.**
- **Don't presume all coaches know how to publish on a Wordpress and what exactly are the prerequisites of online and open source publishing.**

4.1.4 Workflow social media team

It is evident that no project will survive without sufficient and recurrent social media communication. In part I, 4.5.2 and part II, 3.3 you can find examples and the results of social media outreach and acquisition channels.

Journalism students

- write / produce short messages / links for social media channels of EUfactcheck (Facebook / Twitter / Instagram) to announce a new publication on the site
- follow clear instructions from the formats

↓

Editors-in-chief / journalism staff

- follow and check the message and link
- publish the message via Slack, channel #social media
- helpdesk for social media questions and formats

↕

Supervisor / manager

- accepts message from Slack channel #social media or not
  - if not: question for alterations via Slack
  - if yes: publishes on social media

Fig. 8: Roles and responsibilities of the social media team

EUfactcheck had accounts on three social media applications: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. The participating schools created a proposal for social media together with their fact check or blog post and sent it via Slack to the social media team, before the publication of the fact check. The social media team used the same post on Facebook and Twitter, with only slight modifications. We tried to spread the post immediately after publishing the check.

The Instagram account had a special format to make it more attractive and generate more viewers. The instagrammer of the social media team consistently posted the next fact check or blog post that was in line. The explanatory text was in line with Facebook and Twitter, but often adjusted to supplement a graphic post (screenshot only). More #s were used than in Twitter and Facebook, to connect to Insta-communities. On all social media posts we used hashtags #EUfactcheck, #EP19 and #EU19.

Takeaways

- **Make sure everybody feels responsible for social media output.**
- **The participants and the social media team also need to be active after the social media post, in order to answer possible questions and take part in the conversation that might result from the social media post.**
- **Try to set up a social media rotation schedule, certainly if you want to connect the project's own content to current events.**
- **Worn-out cliché, but true: don't think the young generation is very eager to use social media for professional reasons.**
- **Use fixed formats, also for short social media messages / announcements.**
- **Before the start it is a good idea to discuss the aims you want to achieve with social media: whom you're trying to reach on different apps, do you have a different 'tone of voice' in different apps (for example: Twitter content will be more related to news events, Facebook provides background and Instagram introduces the students' experiences / feelings).**
- **Communicate with the production team on fixed intervals about general remarks, do's and don't's, roles and responsibilities, and give and accept advice to and from each other.**

4.1.5 Workflow visualisation team

At a certain moment in the project's preparatory phase it became clear that:

- not all journalism students have the competences to create their own visuals and graphics
- you cannot allow students to use online, free visuals because at a certain point, there will most certainly be difficulties concerning copyright.

That's when we decided to only use the EUfactcheck featured images, own photographs (for blog posts) OR 'order' a visualisation with the visualisation team. The schedule explains how this 'ordering a visualisation' worked.

Journalism students and staff

- follow publication schedule to 'order' a visualisation
- check the styleguide for the timing / deadlines to 'order' a visualisation
- decide for which fact check / blog post you need a visualisation
- choose a label that uniquely identifies the fact check in question. (e.g. main topic, first word(s) of the title, …): this label will be used in all subsequent communication about the visualisation and for the filenames of the datafiles, the instruction file and the visual
- conduct the research of the datafiles and the instruction file
- assemble the data that will go into the visualisation and design the data in a very clear and unambiguous way
- write a clear instruction and follow the instructions + deadline for the order (cf. format / styleguide)
- staff sends instructions and questions via Slack channel #visualisation team
- publish the visual together with fact check or blog post

Visualisation / graphic design manager

- check Slack channel #visualisation on regular basis
- accept the instructions from the participants
  - if okay: produce the visual, upload it on Google Drive (folder Visualisations) and send message via Slack to journalism school
  - if not okay: back to journalism school for more information via Slack

Visualisation / graphic design staff

- receive the order + instructions via manager / Slack
- design the ordered visuals / graphics and communicate with journalism school if necessary
- send result to journalism school before deadline

Coordinator

- check-up and follow-up of workflow
- check deadlines and publications

Fig. 9: Roles and responsibilities of the visualisation team

"Students who participated in the first fact check ('Catalan Public Media Lacks Objectivity and Pluralism') had previously taken an infographics course so they decided to create their own visualisations. Students who participated in the second fact check ('The YES! Survey is representative of the European youth') had not, so we asked the visualisation team to produce two graphics for their work. The outcome of the task developed by the EUfactcheck team was excellent."

Participant in Output Report, May 2019

4.1.6 Publication schedule

An extremely important tool for all participants was the publication schedule. The schedule operated for 16 weeks, in between the first week of February 2019 and the last week of May 2019 (EP elections). Before the publication period, we gave all schools the option to choose a publication rhythm:

- easy going track: two to three fact checks
- medium track: four fact checks
- fast track: six fact checks

Every participant had to produce minimum two blog posts and could 'order' one to two visualisations. After having received the schools' decisions, we could make up an extensive publication schedule with:

- **per week:**
  - deadline / exact date for fact checks and blog posts
  - responsible participant for post
  - member of production team responsible for publications
- **per post:**
  - topic, category and link to website
  - comment from the editor / for production team
  - social media reference
- on fixed dates (every 3-4 weeks): Slack meeting for participants and production team: interim evaluation

PROJ. WEEKS	DEADLINE POST	Blog/ Factcheck/ Social	Topic	Visualisation	Twitter	Facebook	Instagram
WEEK 0	Wednesday 16 January 2019	factcheck	elephant poaching				
	Friday 18 January 2019	factcheck	Salvini migration				x
	Monday 21 January 2019	factcheck	asylum Sweden				x
		blog	Y Vote young voters				
		blog	Utrecht antisemitism				
	Thursday 24 January 2019	BOOTCAMP @Utrecht					
	Friday 1 February 2019	factcheck + social	immigration cost in France		x	x	x
WEEK 1	Monday 4 February 2019	OFFICIAL LAUNCH EUFACTCHECK.EU + PRESS RELEASE					
Wouter	Tuesday 5 February 2019	factcheck + social	the way Facebook works		x	x	
Nadia	Wednesday 6 February 2019	factcheck + social	plastic in menstrual pads		x		x
socials: Anne		blog + social	Pauline decripts plastic				
	Thursday 7 February 2019	factcheck + social	Air pollution		x	x	x
		blog + social	report bootcamp Utrecht			x	
		blog + social	youth skipping class		x	x	
	Friday 8 February 2019	blog	Analysis: EP polls in Greece				
		blog	Issues during factchecking				
WEEK 2	Tuesday 12 February 2019	factcheck + social	import tariffs Serbian products			x	
Wouter		blog	fake news and populism				
Nadia	Wednesday 13 Februari 2019	factcheck + social	populist governments in EU	Visualisation 1		x	
socials: Elvira		blog + social	Berlusconi and the EU			x	
	Thursday 14 Februari 2019	factcheck + social	Weed plantations		x	x	
	Friday 15 February 2019	blog + social	Make us better!		x	x	x
WEEK 3	Tuesday 19 February 2019	factcheck + social	Increase suicide Greece		x	x	
Elvira	Wednesday 20 February 2019	factcheck + social	Endocrine disrupters in food	Visualisation 2	x	x	
Frederik		blog + social	video draw my factchecking		x	x	
socials: Elvira	Thursday 21 February 2019	factcheck + social	Anti-muslim feelings		x	x	
	Friday 22 February 2019	factcheck + social	Catalan media plurality		x	x	
		blog + social	Catalan media plurality analysis				x
WEEK 4	Monday 25 February 2019	factcheck + social	traceable foods		x	x	
	Monday 25 February 2019	factcheck EXTRA	Marine Le Pen tweet		x	x	
Elvira	Tuesday 26 February 2019	factcheck + social	Greenhouse gas emissions		x	x	
Frederik	Thursday 28 February 2019	factcheck + social	Microsoft fears risk of interference		x	x	
socials: Anne	Thursday 28 February 2019	factcheck + social	Turn out elections	Visualisation 3	x	x	
	Friday 1 March 2019	blog + social	Can we get our voices heard		x	x	x

Fig. 10: Publication schedule in the first weeks

The publication schedule is available on Google Drive, folder 'Resources for STAFF', consultable by everybody, but only adjustable by the production team that does the daily follow-up. Next to the publications' deadlines and information, this schedule offers a detailed checklist for posts, the info on teams and their roles and contact details of the partner schools.

Takeaways

- An unpretentious Excel document can function very well as a clear schedule for publications and deadlines. Keep it simple.
- Make sure the schedule is up-to-date at all times and all project members have easy access.
- Be consistent and strict in the follow-up of the schedule.
- If you want the participants to come up with qualitative stories before their deadline, you should also discuss the actual coaching process beforehand and agree on the didactical support the participating staff is giving their students.

4.1.7 Bootcamp

To make sure everybody was on the same track, information was internalised and all necessary resources provided before the actual publication period, we organised a bootcamp in order to inform all participants. We received funding from the Evens Foundation to make sure we could organise these two days logistically and had some financial help for non-Erasmus participants.

The train-the-trainer bootcamp took place in HU Applied Sciences University, in Utrecht, on 24-25 January 2019 and of all participating journalism schools at least one staff member was present.

Programme:
Two renowned keynote speakers Julie Posetti (Head of the Journalism Innovation Project at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism) and Jenni Sargent (Managing director of First Draft) shared their experiences with the audience and we provided practical info sessions and workshops on:

- collaboration EUfactcheck & CrossCheck
- European elections: themes and sources (database of expert sources, relevant institutions, political parties and politicians)
- EUfactcheck organisation & communication

Fig. 11: EUfactcheck participants at the Utrecht Bootcamp

- EUfactcheck methodology & publication
- EUfactchecking in practice

At the end of this two-day train-the-trainer session, every school received their login for the EUfactcheck website registration, knew how to publish on Wordpress and how to use the project communication app Slack. This bootcamp proved to be of inestimable value for the constructive cooperation and participation of the following months and steps in the project.

Takeaways

- **During live trainings like these, make sure there is ample time for Q&A in between the informative sessions, so participants can feel secure and responsible.**
- **Leave space for informal networking so a seemingly heterogeneous group of participants feel they're working towards the same goal.**
- **Try to invite a mixture of experienced and unexperienced project staff, as well as students of previous projects.**

"The bootcamp was essential to understand the nature of the project, the procedure and the characteristics of the contributions that our students have to deliver. Both plenary sessions and workshops were highly informative and it was a fantastic opportunity to meet participants from other journalism programmes across Europe."

Participant in Output Report, May 2019

4.2 Communication process

4.2.1 Google Drive

For the internal project dissemination of information we set up a Google Drive which we shared with all participating staff. All necessary resources can be consulted there:

- publication schedule
- checklist for publication
- formats for fact checks and blog posts
- flowchart and examples
- info on EU databases and experts
- styleguide and publication manual

Apart from all these, also archive material (presentations, instructions, questionnaires), inspiring publications, Output Reports and dissemination material can be found here. The folder 'Resources for STUDENTS' is meant to be cascaded by staff to their respective students, no students were given access.

Some documents can be edited, others not, depending on the role you have in the project (e.g. the production team has overall editing rights).

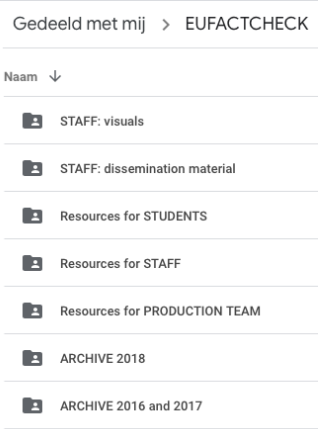


Fig. 12: EUfactcheck Google Drive

4.2.2 Slack

For a fluent project communication we decided to use the cloud-based proprietary instant messaging platform Slack. We used a free version of the platform, this means limited possibilities but enough capacity to serve our needs.

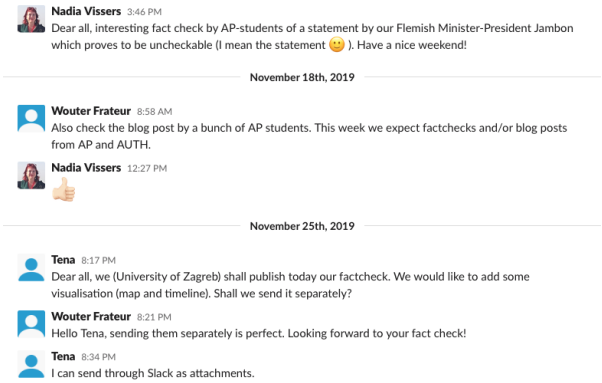


Fig. 13: Example of Slack communication

Advantages
of using Slack

- organisation of different channels by topic / team (#factcheckflow, #productionteam, #wordpress helpdesk etc.)
- easy and quick direct messaging of content and files
- immediate and open communication by everyone in the channel / workspace
- the same advice / communication can be used by all who need it
- integration with Google Drive
- mobile app version

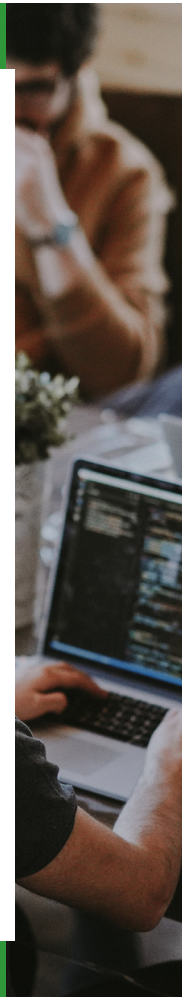
Disadvantages
we encountered

- it's not so easy to convince everybody to use a new communication channel
- so many (social) media need to be checked on daily basis, and this is one extra
- sometimes messages and reactions disappear too soon to the background (although you can always search for them)
- participants made mistakes in using the different channels
- it is not the most ideal platform for group discussions or virtual meetings

Example of an internal communication instruction on how to use the EUfactcheck Slack:

Send a slack message to #productionteam

- if you change anything in existing documents
- if there is a point of attention raised by an individual participant that needs discussion
- if there is information from / about external partners
- be aware that only #production team is a closed group and #social, #visual are meant for all participants to publish and ask questions
- let's allow a reasonable span of time for people to react; keep the sense of urgency reasonable (24 hours?)
- with difficult problems or questions, the coordinator will draw a conclusion on #general.



"Slack was really useful because I could read about the other colleagues' experiences, tips and comments during the preparation and publication process. In the case of EUfactcheck, the organisation with tags (#general, #socialmedia, #visualisations, ...) was well-thought and clearly facilitated our task."

Participant in Output Report, May 2019

4.2.3 Track records

The production team decided to create simple, direct 'track records': visuals with do's, don't's and tips on how to proceed with the methodology, the aspects of gathering and publishing checks and blogs, etc., together with a short update on website and social media impact.

These records were disseminated on Slack and Google Drive on a monthly basis. In total six records were communicated.

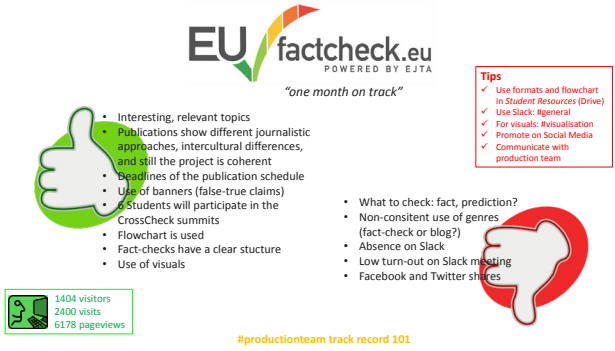


Fig. 14: Track records 101, March 2019

Takeaways

- **Keep internal communication simple: colourful, easy messages do work.**
- **In a process of months it is important to keep on communicating with the project's participants and even more important to keep them enthusiastic. Tell people what works fine, apart from giving advice.**
- **The track records also keep participants involved because they communicate statistics and focus on both ups and downs.**

4.3 Publication process

Although we provided an elaborate publication manual and styleguide (Google Drive) that explained every detail and step in the process, figure 15 shows that not all participants found it a piece of cake to publish on the platform:

That's why we created a channel in Slack: #Wordpress-Helpdesk where participants at all times could ask technical questions on how to publish. The publication team was always ready to help out and sometimes really had to take participants step by step through the publication process.

The publication procedure entails two important levels of control before a fact check or blog post can ultimately be published:

- The students have to provide their national coach / journalism lecturer with a final version. Only after consent from the coach, publication can be a fact.
- The national coach tells the production team the new publication is ready for publication in the Wordpress dashboard or is published on the site. The final responsibility lies with the publication team.

How easy/difficult did you find the publication process on the Wordpress platform (the website)

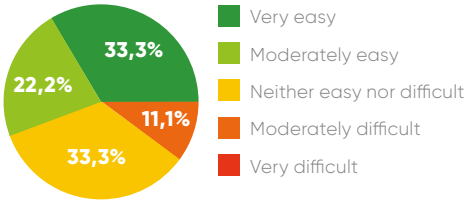


Fig. 15: Question from the Output Report (May 2019)

During the publication period, participants could add visualisations to their products and they had fixed slots during which they could ask the visualisation team to create specific graphs / designs. Communication about this happened on #visualisations. It is very important to make strict agreements on what kind of visualisations are to be used beforehand.

We intended to interact with the public not only on social media, but also via the website (through the button 'Suggest a fact check'). Unfortunately, the participating students didn't have enough time to go into these suggestions.

Takeaways

- Allow enough back-up and help for people who need to use new platforms (in this case Wordpress).
- Create a very elaborate and detailed manual, styleguide and checklist for participants, so they can find all necessary information there.
- Make clear and definite agreements on the use of visuals, photographs and screenshots beforehand.

4.4 Results: facts & figures

The actual outcome on www.eufactcheck.eu during the publication months before and during the European Parliamentary elections will be discussed in detail in the next part of this manual (II. How to organise a fact-checking module in the journalism curriculum).

The underneath figure shows the publication results in May 2019.

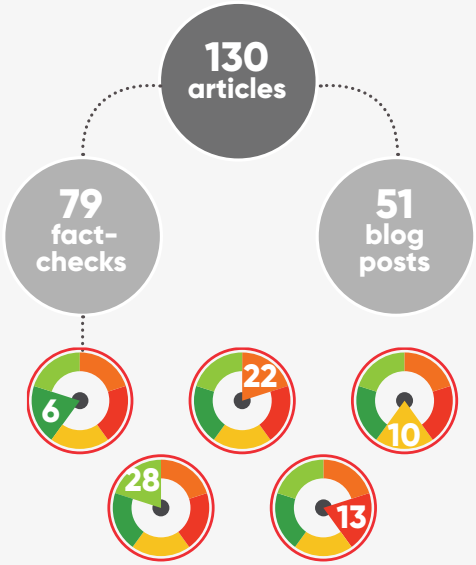


Fig. 16: Publications on www.eufactcheck.eu, May 2019

4.5 Exposure and dissemination: national and international

4.5.1 Website

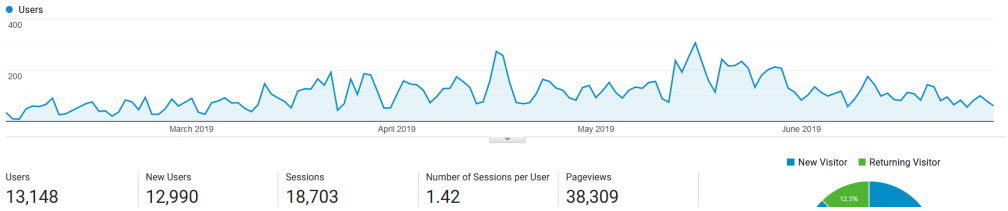


Fig. 17: Website users February-June 2019

The eufactcheck.eu website attracted 13,148 unique visitors in 18,700 sessions from February 2019 to end of June 2019. 56 percent of this traffic was acquired via organic search, 21 percent via social media, 17 percent via direct traffic and 6 percent via referrals.

Remarkably, in the four months after the first active phase of the project ended (July 2019 to October 2019) the website attracted even more traffic (16,673 unique visitors) than in the February-June period, largely thanks to the acquisition via organic search, which was responsible for 77 percent of total traffic in that period.

From a quick analysis of the networks that visited eufactcheck.eu, we learn that we have quite some high-profile visitors. Apart from a considerable amount of visits from non-participating universities and university colleges, we had visits from, among others, the European Commission, the European Parliament,

the Council of the European Union, the European Central Bank, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Organisation for Economic co-operation and Development (OECD), Finanzmarktaufsicht, Deutscher Bundestag, Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, Wirtschaftsförderungsinstitut der Wirtschaftskammer Wien, and press agencies and media companies such as AFP, Westdeutscher Rundfunk Köln, BBC, and CNN.

4.5.2 Social media

Social media played an important role in establishing the EUfactcheck brand and in providing traffic to the eufactcheck.eu website. More information on the actual social media posts you can find in part II, chapter 3.3.

We used Facebook, Twitter and Instagram as an instrument to create rumour around the EUfactcheck brand and to trigger people to check the new posts on our website.

Takeaways

To kick-start the dissemination of your project results to a wider audience, social media are indispensable. After three to four months, search traffic and, hence, SEO, become the main traffic drivers.

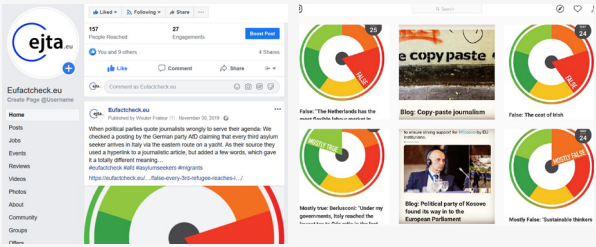


Fig. 18: Examples of social media use (Facebook and Instagram)

4.5.3 Media coverage

Before, during and after the first publication period of EUfactcheck (January-May 2019), the project attracted media attention, both on national level (in different participants' countries) and on international level.

Some examples of national exposure:

- studio interview on Belgian regional television ATV, 18/02/2019: https://atv.be/nieuws/studiogesprek-studenten-controler-en-uitspraken-van-politici-op-juistheid-73721/
- article with interview in Belgian Gazet Van Antwerpen (regional newspaper) and Het Nieuwsblad (national newspaper) and on the websites of both newspapers, 04/04/2019
- article mentioned and cited in Croatian Faktograf.hr: https://faktograf.hr/2019/05/27/ne-postoje-dokazi-5g-tehnologija-zdravlje/
- article on Croatian online portal on media literacy: https://www.medijskapismenost.hr/u-projektu-eu-fact-check-studenti-provjeravaju-istinitost-izjava-politicara/
- radio interview of Kaarina Järventaus (teacher) and Sanni Heikkinen and Vilma Leppikangas (students) at Finnish broadcasting company YLE (Radio Suomen iltapäivä, March 2019).
- radio Interview of Anne Leppäjärvi at Finnish broadcasting company YLE (March 2019): https://areena.yle.fi/1-50096476/
- story concerning the project in Journalisti, magazine of Finnish journalists (May 2019): https://www.journalisti.fi/artikkelit/2019/4/journalismin-opiskelijat-tarkistivat-eu-vitteit-enemmist-sinne-pin/

Fig 19: EUfactcheck coordinator in a panel during the European Youth Days, 30/04/2019

Some examples of international exposure:

- participation in a panel on Citizens vs trolls during the European Youth Days, European Parliament Brussels, 30/04/2019
- EUfactcheck mentioned in an article on CNN's website, 16/05/2019: https://edition.cnn.com/2019/05/16/europe/populism-fake-news-european-elections-intl/

4.5.4 Dissemination at conferences

Apart from creating media exposure it is EUfactcheck's task and intention to communicate about the fact-checking methodology and project during conferences and networking events. Some examples:

- The Universitat Pompeu Fabra team presented the EUfactcheck project at the 5th Symposium of Press Freedom: 'Journalism, Truth and Fake News', which was jointly organised by the Catalan Journalists College and the University of Lleida (May 2-3, 2019).
- Frederik Marain participated in a panel during the conference: 'Infox, post-vérité, rumeurs: Quels problèmes, quelles réponses? // Fake News, Post-truth and Rumors: Problems and Responses'. The conference was organised by the Ecole Nationale Supérieure and Institut Pratique du Journalisme, Université Paris Dauphine PSL, 06/06/2019: https://ignostudies.hypotheses.org/6198/.
- Wouter Frateur gave a guest lecture on the fact check flowchart at the Journalism Department of Ghent University, 15/10/2019.
- Tena Perisin participated in the panel 'Trusting media: joint reflections from media industry': https://nem-initiative.org/nem-summit-2019-program/.

Takeaways

- **Appoint a press officer in your project management team to coordinate the media contacts and exposure.**
- **Provide your participants with press releases, boiler plates and synopses of the project so the communication with the different (inter)national media focuses on the same goals and content.**

4.5.5 Cooperation with organisations

Apart from the schools using their own networks and cooperating with national fact checkers, the project has strong ties with, and hopes to cooperate even closer in the future with:

- First Draft / CrossCheck
- European Data Journalism Network
- Council of Europe
- IFCN
- Evens Foundation
- Dig Deeper
- EU Disinfo Lab

4.5.6 Downloads of flowchart

Another way of checking the exposure of EU-factcheck is to count the downloads of the flowchart, the unique fact-checking instrument of this project, which is illustrated and explained in detail in part II of this manual.

The flowchart is freely downloadable, we only want to know the (academic) background of the user. This way we can keep track and we notice that it has been downloaded over 60 times (until November 2019) by interested users from Europe, Africa, Asia and America.

4.5.7 Comments from the public

Underneath every publication on the website, the public could leave their reactions:

"Leave your comments, thoughts and suggestions in the box below. Take note: your response is moderated."

It was very obvious our site was actively being visited because thousands of comments were left behind. Admittedly: most of them were manipulated bot messages, but quite some had a positive or constructive critical tone or added to the public debate.

Another conclusion to admit: the production team didn't have enough time to moderate this part well. In future we should try to find time to make the public interference more active.

4.6 Tips & tricks

In this chapter we want to synthesise the most important lessons learned by the project management and participants of EUfactcheck until June 2019.

The tips and tricks concerning fact-checking methodology and production strategy will be discussed in the second part of these guidelines and process report.

4.6.1 Important lessons learned

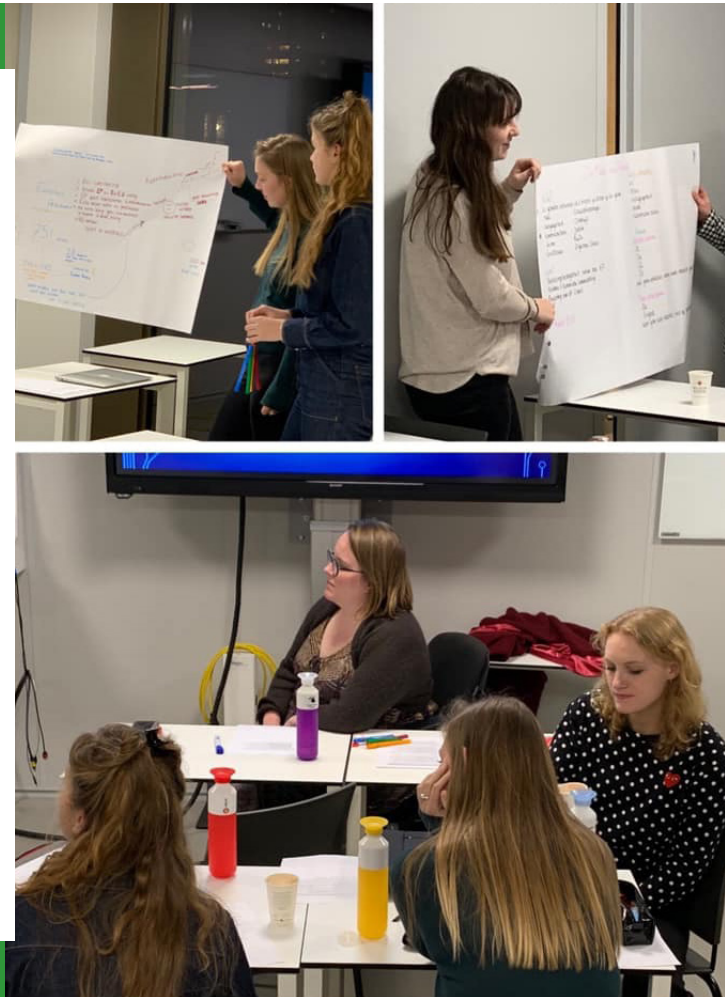
- It was clear to us from the very start that you need a flexible production team with at least five team members if you want to manage a project of this size. This means investing time and providing daily engagement, also on a voluntary basis.
- Within this production team clear agreements on roles and responsibilities need to be made (and put in structures and decision diagrams) before you get started with the project.
- Communication between the production team members should be swift and the threshold to communicate with the production team should be very low: participants need to receive an answer to their questions within a reasonable time span (agree upon this span).

- In order to engage so many (journalism) schools from different parts of Europe, it is necessary to think about different working speeds and diversified roles and profiles for the project's participants. For some schools decision levels and curricula slow down their production process.
- In cross-national projects, it's pivotal that all stakeholders (students, staff, management, audience) are feeling engaged and responsible. Project management does not only include coordination of instructions and advice, but also keeping everybody enthusiastic and making sure you constructively approach all participants on a regular basis. Humour is a valuable device in this.
- Resources at all levels should be available to all participants at all times (Google Drive).
- Decide to use only ONE communication channel, although it will take some time to convince people to not fall back on the habitual channels. Slack is a great tool for project communication.
- You'll need to convince the participants, both students and staff, to be active on different social media and to share the publications. Social media impact is really important to attract viewers / readers to the project's platform.
- Be assured that multinational approaches and intercultural differences have an added value and that participants can learn from each other.
- At the same time it must be clear that all participants are achieving the same goal: unity in diversity. This means there should be ONE topic, ONE language, ONE methodology, ONE platform.
- Be strict in the follow-up of deadlines. Try to organise live meetings with the production team and with the different participants on a regular basis. Of course most information can be shared online and meetings can be organised via videoconferencing, but live communication shows to be more advantageous in order to solve e.g. intercultural conflicts.
- Gather the input and evaluation of different project phases and steps immediately after the respective project phase. That way, the 'Output Reports' give you up-to-date and firsthand information in order to improve the following steps.

4.6.2 Challenges

Of course there is room for improvement and both EUfactcheck participants and production team recognise the following challenges.

- In this project phase we didn't strive to have a balanced regional spread throughout the different parts of Europe and participation was on a voluntary basis (with commitment agreements though).
- In the near future we would hope for more countries and journalism schools to participate and to have a more balanced representation of European regions.
- With 20 journalism schools and more than 400 students participating, we could have had much more impact on social media. We need to ask ourselves the question on how to motivate more social media participation.
- If you cooperate with teaching staff from so many different countries, it's obvious there will be differences in pedagogical vision and approach to coaching and degree of involvement with students. To guarantee the long-term success of this project, we should discuss and set standards on the methods of coaching the journalism students during the actual fact checking.
- We should also strive for closer cooperation with legacy media and invite all participants to build more bridges to and with the respective national fact-checking sites and organisations.
- We didn't maximise the direct engagement of civil society. In the future we should think more about audience and trust building and as such create a better involvement and higher public impact.
- All participants stayed on their own 'national island' with groups of national students fact checking in their university (college). Only Utrecht University of Applied Sciences worked with a group of international students.
- A next step in this project could be to create cross-national cooperation between students.
- We continuously ask ourselves the question 'How to make the project permanent and sustainable?' We hope the next chapter provides a tentative answer to this.



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5 Future

5.1 Short term: autumn 2019

The Output Reports state that most participants want to continue publishing fact checks and blog posts on the acknowledged collaborative platform, within the general theme 'EU policy'. It would be a waste of energy and experience to no longer continue with the established brand EUfactcheck.

That's why we decided for the immediate future to have a low level publication schedule with fewer than 10 participating schools, in the run-up to a new bootcamp, after which production can go up again.

'First generation' participants can continue to implement the lessons learned in their curricula and use eufactcheck.eu for publications.

5.2 Medium term: winter 2020

In February 2020 we plan a new train-the-trainer session, in order to give 'new' participants the chance to join the project and to get accustomed to the methodology in this project. The workshops and trainings will be focusing on Central and Eastern European countries, but also other countries are being invited. Moreover, we hope that some of the existing participants will join the training and share their knowledge and expertise.

During the training days, this EUfactcheck report will serve as a guiding principle for all participating schools.
After this train-the-trainer meeting both 'old' and 'new' participants will be publishing fact checks and blog posts, based on a structured publication schedule.

5.3 Long term: summer 2020

We hope to find extra and structural funding to be able to consolidate our permanent platform to be used for publications of the participants' sustainable curriculum units on fact checking and we hope to widen the project's range to more journalism schools and also other students. These plans are open for discussion in February 2020 in Ljubljana.

> "The response from the students was huge – they learned a lot and they really liked it. It would be a pity not to use the website and all experience that has been built up."
>
> Participant in Output Report, May 2019

2

How to organise a fact-checking module in the journalism curriculum

Monique Canto-Sperber
Chairwoman of the Executive Committee - Evens Foundation

Introduction

We live in times of trust decline. Citizens are more sceptic about politicians and public institutions, but also about the business sector, NGOs and media. Despite the diverse and plural sources globalisation has enabled, access to reliable and verified information is a growing challenge. False news and constructed, manipulated facts pose a huge threat to our societies, jeopardising freedom of speech – first pillar of democracy.

Media literacy has long been at the core of the Evens Foundation's work – we initiate and support projects that bring up attention for hate speech, critical thinking and trustful journalism (just to mention Media Literacy Magazine, Media Meets Literacy conferences and our recent initiative – Building Trust in Journalism project). The vision of our founders Georges and Irene Evens – Living together harmoniously in Europe – frames our commitment to democratic values of diversity, freedom, responsibility and solidarity. Audiences equipped with critical thinking skills on one hand, and ethical journalism on the other, are key drivers against waves of populism.

To improve the quality of public discourse the collaboration with all actors of media context is vital. Professional, trustworthy media that responsibly support citizens in forming opinions and participate in the fact-based debate are needed more than ever. The Evens Foundation joined EJTA to support the unique EUfactcheck project crafted for academics and journalism students. The project's pivotal task is to provide a sustainable fact-checking methodology for future journalists. With this innovative, pedagogical approach we aim to supplement curricula of journalism schools across Europe. This report aims to make the EUfactcheck methodology, knowledge and experience widely accessible to (future) journalists. We believe it is a highly practical tool for its users in a rapidly changing media reality.

1 Necessity of a fact-checking module in the journalism curriculum

The constantly growing stream of reporting on misinformation, false news and fact checking is hard to keep up with. With the risk of reproducing what has been said in uncountable publications, research papers and handbooks, we can't describe guidelines on fact checking without highlighting once more the evident: professional journalism, freedom of speech and the possibility to rely on trustworthy information are pillars of democracy, which are under attack nowadays.

These values are being eroded by 'post-truth' politics, the fast spread of false news and the uncontrollable speed of social media.

Although a cursory look at history reveals that manipulation of information is nothing new, in the 21st century the spread of mis- and disinformation is clearly much more possible and easier through social networks and messaging.

"But the 21st century has seen the weaponisation of information on an unprecedented scale. Powerful new technology makes the manipulation and fabrication of content simple, and social networks dramatically amplify falsehoods peddled by the States, populist politicians, and dishonest corporate entities, as they are shared by uncritical publics."[23]

Even though social media companies continuously express the need to filter news and to undertake actions to self-regulate the spread of false news, and political regulations try to restrict social media's power, there is still a very significant role for journalists and journalism education. In this endangered world, facts that fuel public debate and the democratic process are sacred and democratic society needs a professional journalism that is accurate, balanced, impartial and transparent.

Note

Maybe a short explanation on the terminology used in this report is at its place here. Since the oxymoron 'fake' news has become a weaponised and coloured word, we'd rather refer to false or untrue news.

Inspired by Firstdraftnews' diagram on disinformation disorder[24], we use the word 'misinformation' to refer to misleading, incorrect information created and published without manipulative or malicious intent. Disinformation, on the other hand, is a general term for deliberate attempts to manipulate the public with dishonest information.

Although disinformation is particularly dangerous for society, EUfactcheck is not specifically tackling this form of false news since we're not fighting structurally organised and well resourced false messaging, often reinforced by automated technology. We're not fighting the trumpet of amplification of anonymous online posts nor memes or visual hoaxes but we train our students to check political statements on EU politics in mainstream media and as such hope to contribute to a value-free debate that supports democracy.

"In today's context of disinformation and misinformation, the ultimate jeopardy is not unjustifiable regulation of journalism, but that publics may come to disbelieve all content – including journalism. In this scenario, people are then likely to take as credible whatever content is endorsed by their social networks, and which corresponds with their hearts – but leaves out engagement with their heads."[25]

In order to serve the public's interest and need for correct information, it is an imperative to teach our journalists-to-be verification and all the professional competences to fact check information. In this context we like to mention the one-liner "we're not at war, we're at work". So it's more than evident that journalism programmes should invest in curriculum units on fact checking, whether as an independent course or as a part of an existing course such as Research.

"The darkest place in hell is reserved for those who don't take responsibility in times of moral crisis"

Dante Alighieri, 13th century

Apart from acknowledging the absolute necessity of incorporating a sustainable fact-checking unit in their journalism curriculum, participants of EUfactcheck also notice a gap in their programme or lack of interest from their students in EU politics and reporting. The choice for EU affairs as the general theme for all our fact-checking exercises and publications on eufactcheck.eu should contribute to narrowing that gap.

In times of fast journalism and underrepresentation of European reporting in the national media, the role of fact checking EU policies in journalism education is most necessary to contribute to the public's understanding of EU policies. Journalists should analyse EU politics and show that the national is global and the global is national.

As a consequence, most participants did include a unit on EU politics and reporting in their fact-checking classes.

With the development of a common methodology for fact checking in a pan-European network of journalism schools, we intentionally focus on the basic main competences of students: research, verify, analyse claims, figures and contexts and critically assess and rate information brought to the public.

This is what fact-checking sites such as FactCheck.org call 'first-generation fact checking' Although we fully recognise the arguments for second- and third-generation fact checking ("move from just publishing to publish and act" and "work for system change and create institutions to challenge the casual acceptance of deceptive and misleading behaviour")[26] with this project we want to stress and prove the primary need for journalists-to-be to train the most basic fact-checking techniques through publishing accurate and critical texts.

With these practical guidelines we want to spread the EUfactcheck methodology even further, hoping that our lessons learned (by trial and error) during the process provide takeaways and valuable input for staff and students of journalism and other institutes all over the world.

The detailed description of the project's process (history, organisation, communication, …) is to be found in part I of this report. In part II we focus on the pedagogical approach and methodology used during the project's first publication phase. In the following chapters you can read the lessons learned by journalism students and staff from 20 European journalism schools who fact checked claims by politicians and other public figures in general and social media in the run-up to the 2019 EU elections.

The project's main aim is to raise awareness of the importance of fact-based reporting with European journalism students, by building a sustainable curriculum unit, stimulating reflection, and providing educational material and a common methodology for fact checking.

2 Methodology used in EUfactcheck

2.1 General guidelines

To perform a good fact check you need an interesting claim: a statement by a politician or another public figure that raises a question, makes people think “What?”, can be a useful claim.

Below a copy of some agreements the EUfactcheck participants made during one of the preparatory meetings (October 2017):

The most obvious claims for the fact-checking project are quantitative statements such as number-based claims, vague claims (many, most, often, increasing amount, etc.) and inaccurate use of numbers. Of course students of journalism should be able to check more than just quantitative claims. They should also look at the following:

- If someone is wrongly taking credit for something (for instance if the unemployment rate is going down, politicians want to take credit for the change, even though the real reason might be just growing economy in whole Europe).
- Changes of position (some candidate is accusing others of the same politics that his / her party was doing earlier when they were in government).
- Promises vs. reality (for example if a politician says he / she wants to change legislation on immigration employers, we could check if this falls within the executive powers of the European Parliament).
- Promises of politicians against ones' party manifestos – and maybe we could check if there is inconsistence with party programme.

The students and coaches were looking for such claims in the legacy media, on social media accounts of politicians and political parties, and in party programmes.
The claims were found in diverse sources: Twitter, Facebook, blogs of politicians, television debates, national and international press releases, media reports, political meetings, …
An advantage of searching on social media accounts is that statements are not filtered or edited by a journalist and that the fact checker is not checking the journalist's work.

Because EUfactcheck wanted to contribute to a better public debate in the run-up to the 2019 EU elections, claims had to cover issues related to the European Union.
Examples: 'Foods within the EU are traceable all along the supply chain' or 'The Netherlands is the least anti-muslim country in Europe'.

"One student said: "I've read more political interviews than at any other time in my life. And I found that politicians are careful about what to say. They rarely argue with facts I could check."

"Main difficulty: to find a claim that can be fact checked. A lot of the statements were just political promises and general information without clear-cut facts. Students relied too much on information in the media and were not aware that they shouldn't have taken everything published in the media as truth or facts."

Participants in Output Report, May 2019

"It was interesting to see how some politicians construct a false reality out of correct bits of information."

Student testimonial

Takeaways

- **It is difficult to define claims and to assess their relevance: "Checkable claims are not always relevant or interesting; interesting claims or not always checkable".**
- **Finding a good claim seems to be a huge first threshold to overcome by students. It would be a good idea to search and discuss the claims in groups of two or three.**
- **Make sure you have the discussion about the definition of a 'good' claim beforehand so that it is clear that some statements such as predictions are no claims to be checked.**
- **You need to be very clear about the content of claims to be checked (in this project: political claims about EU affairs) in order to avoid chaotic and loose publications.**

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2.2 Formats

2.2.1 Fact checks

In order to have a coherent website, all EUfactcheck participants agreed to write their fact checks in a well-defined format.

Figure 20: Screenshot of a fact check on EUfactcheck

The format consists of five elements: rating, claim, intro, article, outcome. In order to prevent readers from believing false claims, the title of the fact check article starts with the rating, followed by the actual claim (e.g.: 'False: The upcoming EU elections are "a referendum on abortion"'). The introduction includes the most important facts: when the claim was made, where / by whom, a link to the original claim, and states the outcome of the fact check. The body text contains a transparent report of the research, interviews, findings and insights the students gathered. It gives the arguments the students base their conclusions and rating on. If students refer to published texts or important sources, they provide a clickable link. The last paragraph contains a compact conclusion followed by the outcome of the fact check. This paragraph is in bold.

To make sure all fact checks were published in this format, we provided all participants with an elaborate manual with guidelines not only on text and content, but also on lay-out (e.g. which fonts?), textual organisation (e.g. what appears how on the home page?), categories, tags, featured images (truth barometers), visuals ('NO other visuals but screenshots and featured images' and 'How to order a visualisation with the visualisation team?') and the option to publish students' names.

Fig 21: Visualisation produced by students of Milan University

Underneath the final checklist for publishing a fact check:

Before publishing

- Check the publication schedule for your deadline.
- In WordPress: make sure your fact check is in the correct category.
- Check if the author's name is correct.
- Check if all your hyperlinks work and open in a new tab.
- Check if your headline fits on the home page.
- Check your intro text (lead) to see if it fits on the home page.
- Make sure you have enough white space between the paragraphs and have used subheadlines where necessary .
- Screenshots: visually attractive (you can read it), not clickable, including a caption in italics with a link to the original site.
- Prepare a social media post and put it in the Slack #socialmedia channel. If you have any extra material concerning your text, great! Photos? Interesting links?
- Let the production team know you've published - do so in Slack.
- Keep track of comments on your post on the website and on social media.

2.2.2 Blog posts

The format for the written blog posts is strictly defined, but students have more freedom to also publish cartoons, vlogs, photo blogs and other creative productions.

A list of guidelines helps participants with their publications: info about headline, category, main text (limited number of words, lay-out advice), photos (only own photos and screenshots), etc.

In this first production phase, blog posts, which are published on the page 'Behind the Facts', are mostly textual products. Students describe process reflections, media monitoring, critical thoughts on European institutions, fact checking, journalism, citizenship. These posts prove to have a great added value since they echo the voice of young journalists-to-be.

Takeaways

- **Of course we discussed all 'rules and regulations' for publication of fact checks and blog posts in detail beforehand. Make sure all stakeholders are aware of the final decisions taken and know where to find the manuals and styleguides.**
- **With multinational journalistic publications, you need to consider intercultural differences between the different participants: the professional culture and context of different societies in relation to journalism. For example, not all participants had the same opinion on what the content of a fact check or blog post should be and during the publication period we had constructive and very interesting discussions about this.**
- **In this phase, we do focus our fact-checking efforts to written or spoken statements. In the next phases, we would like to include fact checking of visual material. This requires a new set of skills and methodologies.**
- **Also the products itself are mainly written text and it would be interesting to expand to (audio)visual content and new formats. This is something the project wants to tackle in the near future.**

2.3 Rating scales

The goal of a fact check is to come to a 'final' conclusion on a claim, a rating. In EUfactcheck we use the ratings: true, mostly true, mostly false, false and uncheckable. Sometimes a fact check does not lead to a clear rating because there is no reliable source material. Students can then give context and background information on the claim.

Fig. 22: EUfactcheck rating scales

It is not always very easy to make a clear distinction between true / mostly true or mostly true / mostly false, but that is in fact an important part of the learning process and competences the students need to require.

"The students had questions on how to rate claims. Many found that a politician quotes a number correctly but puts it in the wrong context. (...) So, we would like to suggest to introduce the rating 'misleading'."

Participant in Output Report, May 2019

Uncheckable

A very interesting rating is 'uncheckable' because it proves exactly why fact checking is such an important discipline for journalists. 'Uncheckable' shows the difficulty of checking facts and figures in many different (regional, socio-economic, …) contexts. Sometimes the material you're checking is too complex to be comparable ('Salaries of EU officials' : https://EUfactcheck.eu/factcheck/uncheckable-4000-eu-officials-are-paid-more-than-merkel/) or the criteria in different European states are not clear, so cross-border research is impossible. Also quite often 'vague' terminology is used ('fraternal party' https://EUfactcheck.eu/factcheck/uncheckable-the-national-coalition-party-and-united-russia-have-been-fraternal-parties-for-a-long-time/) and evidence can come from 'hazy' sources or you simply can't find international surveys on the exact topic. This category shows students that media shouldn't generalise too easily or should at least nuance better.

Takeaways

- **In order to avoid spreading false news even further without the public realising it, we added the rating of the fact check as the first word in the title and we created banners (false / mostly false) to put over the screenshot of the checked political claim or over the image used.**
- **Have your students check other fact-checking sites and certainly read and analyse publications on the project's site before publishing themselves, in order to learn from their peers and give their publications more 'weight / seriousness'.**

2.4 Flowchart

2.4.1 An educational tool for journalism students

In the run-up to the EUfactcheck project there were several discussions on methodology, on how to perform a solid fact check with a substantiated rating. We noticed that every journalism school had its own methodology, which was often based on common sense and 'gut feeling' and lecturers often had difficulties explaining the complex fact-checking process to students.

That's why we developed an educational tool to be used as a common methodology: a flowchart. It disassembles fact checking into its different parts and leads students step by step through the fact-checking process. In that way the flowchart helps students understand all the different steps to be taken during the fact-checking process. It is an educational tool.

Students are given instructions on elements to which they should pay particular attention, and they are warned of any ambiguities or inadequacies in the claim.

The flowchart guarantees an objective rating because all personal preferences or dislikes are switched off. The aim is that several fact checks of the same claim would lead to the same rating.

The flowchart also offers the transparency that is essential in the case of fact checking. The reader is perfectly aware of the methodology used and can, in turn, check it himself. The three parts of the flowchart can be found in Appendix 2.

2.4.2 Three steps in the fact-checking flow

The flowchart leads students through three steps in the fact-checking process: analyse the claim, analyse the author and source, fact check.

Analyse claim

The students make a prima facie analysis of the claim: they understand the checkability of the claim, all its components, implications and any shortcomings. In the latter case warning lights are triggered. They indicate inadequacies or failures in the claim that hinder to meet a 100% objective and factual claim. We discern eleven warning lights (see fig. 24 for the eleven possible warning lights in this flow).

In the first phase of the fact check students should also analyse the full article to check if it contains modifications or nuances of the claim. A unique element of this flowchart is 'the shaky claim'. If a claim fails to meet the standard of being 100% objective and factual, it is shaky. The degree of shakiness will depend on the number of warning lights. Important: even if some of the shakiness of the original claim is removed by further research and clarification, the degree of shakiness stays the same.

Analyse author / source

In the second step students should identify the claim's author and the claim's source. The author is the person who is quoted as having stated the claim. Students have to find out if the author is qualified to make the claim and what his / her function and affiliation are. Is he / she member of a political party, of a think tank, an NGO, …?
The author bases his / her claim on a source. This is the person (organisation, …) whom the claim author refers to as the source of the claim. Claim author and claim source can be the same. Students also have to investigate and assess the source. Is it credible? Is it an expert, a researcher, and is he / she connected or affiliated to a company, a third sector organisation, university, …?

Fact check

The third step in the process is the actual fact check. The students identify and find the material that the primary source bases its claim on (research, survey, statistics, …..; often a combination). We call this the primary source's source material. The students check if the material confirms the claim or not. They also contact the primary source, find second (third, …) experts and check if they confirm the claim or not. Depending on the answers and insights of the experts students rate the claim.

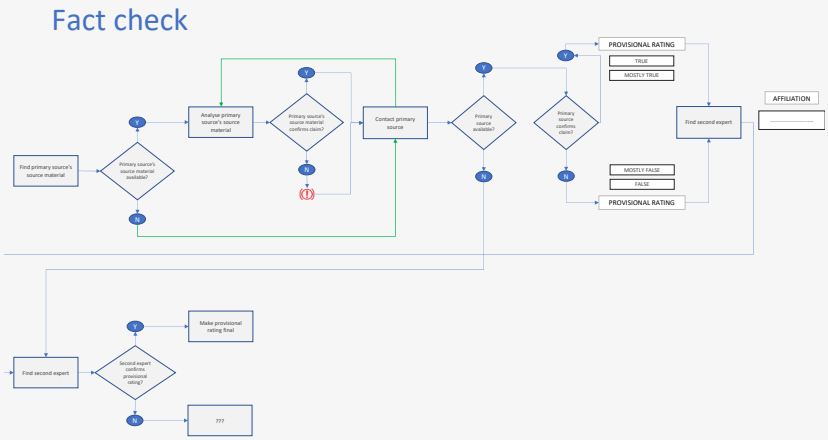


Fig 23: Flow chart, part III: Fact check

Warning lights

These are the eleven warning lights, their implications and actions to be undertaken:

Phase	Warning lights	Implication of warning lights	Action
Analyse claim	Subject not clearly defined	Shaky claim	Check with primary source
	Qualitative claim	Depends on primary source's and second expert's judgment	
	Factual, quantitative claim, but vague	Shaky claim	Check with primary source
	Percentage: 100% not (clearly) defined	Shaky claim	Check with primary source
	Geography not clear / not relevant	Shaky claim	Check with primary source
	Period not clear / not relevant	Shaky claim	Check with primary source
	Quantification / fact based on ...: not clear	Shaky claim	Check with primary source
	Survey methodology	Shaky claim	Check with primary source
Analyse source	Primary source not identified	Shaky claim OR Uncheckable	
	Claim in original context is different	Shaky claim	Check with primary source
Fact check	Primary source's sour-ce material does NOT confirm claim	Shaky claim	Check with primary source

Fig 24: List of EUfactcheck warning lights

We propose to add a 'shakiness' indicator, with a value from 0 to 11, depending on the number of warning lights, to each fact check article. In his / her research and contacts with the primary source and other experts, the fact checker should pay special attention to these warning lights. In the fact check article, the fact checker should mention the implications of the warning lights for the evaluation of the original claim.

2.4.3 Fundamental questions

Of course, this proposal for a generic fact-checking flow gives rise to a number of fundamental questions about the fact-checking process and its ultimate goals. Below we list some of these questions.

- Is a prediction always uncheckable? What with 'if … then' predictions?
- What do we do if the second expert doesn't confirm the provisional rating of the primary source? Do we contact a third expert? But: in this case we will always have non-unanimity. Does non-unanimity automatically lead to an 'uncheckable' rating?
- Must a fact checker (student) always check the primary source's source material?
- Do we have / build a list of claim author's or claim primary source's capacities that we decide to consider as absolutely reliable, e.g.: no double checking with additional experts needed? Examples: Eurostat, OECD, World Bank, ….

"The biggest challenge before and during the fact-checking process was making students understand the requirement to be aware of the need to analyse not only the claims but also to look closely at who the authors or the sources of those claims were. They understood the value of taking all the needed steps to deliver a thorough fact check."

"I did not force the students to follow the flowchart when working on their fact checks. But I did spend two lectures on introducing the flowchart and discussing the questions it addresses. So I think that the flowchart did help to introduce the right mindset for fact checking."

"Our students did not find major problems using the EUfactcheck flowchart, in fact, it was a very useful tool to orientate them throughout the process."

Participants in Output Report, May 2019

Takeaways

- **If you want to use a systematic methodology such as an analysing flowchart, you need to keep it as simple as possible. There is probably room for improvement here (we should think about a visually more attractive and simplified version, together with a clear manual).**
- **With complex algorithms / flowcharts like these, it is very practical to print out the charts and have students fill in step by step. This clearly helps them in the fact-checking process.**
- **Do explain the steps and terminology and spend enough time / lectures showing how the flowchart works with case studies / examples and discussing the questions it addresses. That way you can introduce the right mindset of fact checking with your students.**

2.4.4 Concrete example

"About 50 percent of the loading space in trucks on European roads consists of air"

Claim by Christian Leysen, Belgian entrepreneur and politician (De Standaard, 19/09/2018)

Subject (about whom/what)	Loading space in trucks
Claim	50% of loading space is not used
Claim author	Christian Leysen
Quantitative claim	About 50% (of 100% of the loading space of the trucks on European roads)
Geography	European roads (only EU? Not clear, turn on warning light)
Period	Not clear (turn on warning light)
Quantification based on	Not clear (turn on warning light)
Claim's author	Christian Leysen
Capacity	Company (Ahlers, logistics), and government
Affiliation	Open Vld (Flemish liberal party)
Medium	De Standaard, 19/09/2019 (Flemish newspaper)
Claim source (primary source)	Not clear -> request primary source from author
Primary source's source material	Not clear from this article -> request primary source from author and find primary source's source material

The students now know exactly what the next steps in the fact-checking process are. By reading the article they may find some more information on the claim and will be able to switch off some warning lights. The degree of shakiness remains the same.

In appendix 2 the different steps of the flow chart are published and in appendix 3 you can find the detailed worksheets we use to coach the students during the fact-checking process. We hope that these practical tools are of useful help to all pedagogical staff members who want to start fact checking in an analytical way with their students.

Did the flowchart help your students to analyse a claim?

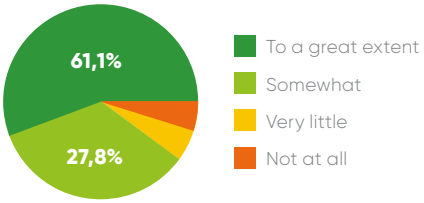


Fig. 25: Question in Output Report

"For journalism students, it is quite hard to get the right coordinates from the right people. And surely to get information that journalists mostly get. We want to encourage experts, organisations, companies etc. to help the future journalists. You help us to train and prepare for our future job and we want your help getting deceptions out of the world."

(Blog post: https://eufactcheck.eu/blogpost/make-us-better/)

2.5 Database

Because it's not easy for journalism students to find experts to confirm or contradict their checks (see testimonial) and to find specialised information, we (international students participating in the project) created a database that aims to support fact checkers in giving them a wide range of primary sources linked to the European Union. It is made in Excel with a tab-folders format to categorise the information. It starts with a content list, with internal links to different folders.

The database is linked to the European Union, therefore the different 'institutions' are leading and reflected in the titles of the first part of the folders whereas the second part of the database consists of 'other relevant institutions'. Also the political parties and several important themes / topics are listed.

Per folder the most important sources are listed with links to websites or webpages, in this way there is always access to the most recent information.

Takeaways

- **It is essential to have an expert and information database because it not only saves time but also lists primary sources.**
- **Some data are difficult to find using Google or internal website search options and can now be reached in one click.**
- **Making a database and maintaining it cost time, but it makes you constantly aware of the importance of primary information.**
- **Working together with students on a database triggers discussion on sources, reliability and the EU in general.**
- **Only few participating schools said to have used the database, this means in future we need an 'instructional lesson ' so schools can include it in their courses on fact checking and research.**
- **We need a team to keep the database up-to-date, especially on the 'changeable information' such as the members of political parties.**
- **The search options within the database could be improved by using tags / tag words.**
- **We need more sources from the public domain, not only related to EU but also related to themes / topics.**

2.6 Transparency

As an educational fact-checking project we realise that it is of utmost importance to have and use an instrument to check ourselves.

That's is why we adhere to the existing commitments of the Code of Principles of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) https://ifcncodeofprinciples.poynter.org/ and declare that we abide by:

- a commitment to nonpartisanship and fairness
- a commitment to transparency of sources
- a commitment to transparency of funding & organisation
- a commitment to transparency of methodology
- a commitment to open and honest corrections

Since we're not a 24/7 fact-checking organisation with an incorporation status or indefinite lifespan, we won't attempt to obtain the IFCN verification badge.

We also think we show our transparent approach in publishing our methodology open source, meaning that the flowchart can be downloaded from the website. For the transparency in the fact-checking process of the checkers themselves, we were always very careful to clearly mention all sources of the published checks and if possible we published a link to these sources in the fact check.

3

Outcome

3.1 Organisation in different schools: teaching conditions

From the previous chapters, it is clear that we cooperated with 20 journalism schools, all over Europe, with different curricula and different level of students.

The Output Report (in which every participant contributed with detailed answers about process questions in May-June 2019) learns us that more than 400 students of journalism took part in the production phase of February-May 2019. Some schools worked with very small groups (between three and seven students), others with class groups (of 30 or even 60 students).

"It is the responsibility of all of us to invest time and effort in uncovering our biases and in verifying our sources of information." [27]

The graph below shows that the majority of participating students were Bachelor students (11 schools or 61,1% of EUfactcheck participants involved Bachelor students) and most participating students studied in the first or second year (13 schools or 72,2% of EUfactcheck participants). This proves that the methodology is meant and used to be part of a pedagogical process in which we want to teach journalism students basic research and fact-checking skills.

Level of participating students

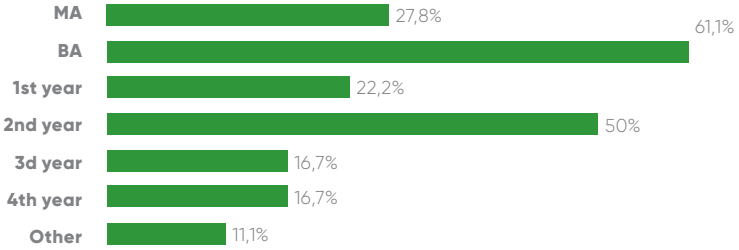


Fig. 26: Question in Output Report

To participate in EUfactcheck, the schools committed themselves to organise a module or course unit on fact checking in their general curriculum, be it in a separate course or as a part of an existing course. This fact-checking unit ought to be officially registered, with a definite number of EC (European Credits) for the students to gain.

In some journalism schools the unit was incorporated in 'Advanced Reporting', 'Investigative Journalism', 'Crossmedia Project', 'Research' and 'Ethics of Journalism'. In others it was a stand-alone course e.g 'Methods of Fact Checking'. All participants used a common procedure to make sure their students were prepared and informed about the project and the method of fact checking. They started with introductory infosessions and workshops (fact checking, use of the flowchart, use of the database, producing infographics, info about EU and EU policies, etc.). For some of these sessions professional fact checkers or trained journalists were invited.

After the general sessions, the coaches tried some examples together with their students, instructing them on e.g. choosing claims. The final step was that students would work on their own fact checks and blog posts and would have regular follow-up meetings with their coach(es).

"First, we looked at the fact-checking process of traditional media. Next, we went through the flowcharts and worked on a few examples together. In the third step, the students had to work on their own fact checks."

"Weekly meetings with everybody, and more often when needed. We also used e-mail, Moodle and Google Drive."

"Students could discuss with me (during the lectures and in social nets) the chosen topic and the whole article, I would help with the editing and with translations."

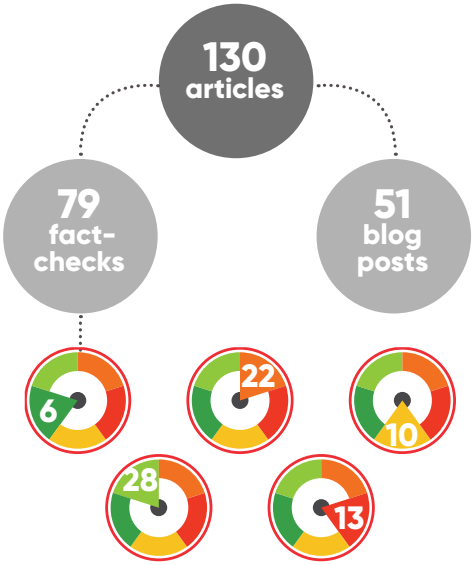
Participants in Output Report, May 2019

Takeaways

- **We should spend more time at arousing interest from the students for European policies and expand their knowledge about EU institutions. There is still a gap in some journalism curricula and students are not extremely interested in spontaneously choosing to check claims actually related to the EU.**
- **No extra efforts for translation into one common language – English – was needed since most participants organise English courses or have proficient English language users among their students.**
- **The fact-checking module should be allowed enough time in the programme, at least a couple of weeks or preferably months. Students need to get used to and internalise the new techniques and methodology. Moreover, even if it doesn't take a lot of time to find a good claim and expert (which it most often does), it will take a while for the expert to respond to the student's verification question.**
- **Make sure your students introduce themselves in a formal / official way to the experts, referring to the name and size of the project, because some students' testimonials tell us that they are not always being taken seriously.**
- **A few participants also worked with heterogeneous groups (different levels and nationalities) and this proved to be very valuable. In the future we would hope to work with journalism students in cross-school projects and focus on peer coaching, via e-learning or during project weeks at one location.**

3.2 Publications on website: facts and figures

The graph underneath shows the website publications in the first production phase:



From February 2019 to May 2019, students in the EUfactcheck project published 79 fact checks on political claims about EU issues and 51 blog posts, in which they reflected on their fact-checking activities and on what they learned about fact-based reporting.

3.2.1 Fact checks

The numbers show us that 34 of the fact checks were true / mostly true, 35 were false / mostly false and 10 were uncheckable. The claims of the checks covered both national and cross-national content (e.g. 'Hungary against Sargentini' https://EUfactcheck.eu/factcheck/mostly-true-hungary-spends-18-million-euros-on-campaign-against-sargentini/), and were related to European issues or approaches.

The online tags illustrate there is a recurrence of 'popular' themes which students found interesting and easy to check because they were frequently reported on in the media during the publication phase, such as climate change and environment, social-economical issues, migration, Brexit, the situation of students and youngsters. We didn't want to impose specific themes, but the production team kept an eye on important themes being covered and on a minimal equilibrium level within different topics.

Evidently EU political issues, institutions, politicians, legislation and parties were being covered in detail. Some examples:

- https://EUfactcheck.eu/factcheck/mostly-false-travelling-circus-of-the-european-parliament-from-brussels-to-strasbourg-costs-200-million-euros-annually/
- https://EUfactcheck.eu/factcheck/mostly-false-turnout-at-national-elections-in-europe-is-between-70-and-80-percent/
- https://EUfactcheck.eu/factcheck/mostly-true-between-25-000-to-30-000-lobbyists-are-working-in-brussels/
- https://EUfactcheck.eu/factcheck/true-the-eu-continues-to-pay-to-turkey/
- https://EUfactcheck.eu/factcheck/true-80-percent-of-the-european-money-for-agriculture-goes-to-the-20-percent-largest-farmers/
- https://EUfactcheck.eu/factcheck/true-voter-turnout-in-ep-elections-has-steadily-decreased-since-the-late-1970s/

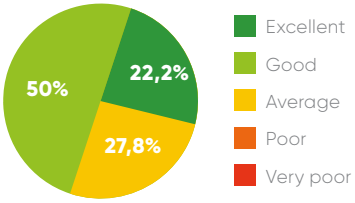
The EUfactcheck way of checking claims in a written form of storytelling required a high standard quality of the texts. The largest part of checks proved to be of this required high journalistic quality and covered difficult topics thoroughly, e.g.

- 'Endrocrine disruptors in food' https://EUfactcheck.eu/factcheck/mostly-false-80-of-the-total-load-of-endocrine-disruptors-come-from-food/ (scientific content)
- 'Shadow economy' https://EUfactcheck.eu/factcheck/mostly-true-online-payment-terminals-would-prevent-the-shadow-economy-from-occurring-by-140-million-euros-per-year/ (economical issues)
- 'Western Sahara trade agreements' https://EUfactcheck.eu/factcheck/uncheckable-the-addendum-to-the-eu-morocco-agreement-does-not-comply-with-the-decision-made-by-the-eu-court-of-justice/ (analysis African trade agreements)
- 'Electric cars' https://EUfactcheck.eu/factcheck/mostly-false-electric-cars-generate-higher-emissions-than-diesel-cars/ (technical terminology)
- 'Croatian legislation and EU laws' https://EUfactcheck.eu/factcheck/mostly-true-two-thirds-of-european-laws-are-part-of-croatian-legislation/ (EU and national legislation)

Apart from the political topics, also themes concerning social media, journalism and fact checking showed to be important:

- https://EUfactcheck.eu/factcheck/microsoft-fear-of-cyber-attacks-ahead-of-eu-elections/
- https://EUfactcheck.eu/factcheck/mostly-true-the-way-facebook-works-is-simple-the-more-money-you-spend-the-wider-your-audience/

When asked how they would rate the products on the website, the participating journalism staff answered the following, showing that the majority of published fact checks were of more than average quality, despite the fact that all students were in the middle of a learning process.



How would you rate the general quality / content of the fact-checks your students produced?

Fig.27: Question in Output Report

A positive testimonial from a EUfactcheck coach shows the project really has an impact:

https://EUfactcheck.eu/factcheck/mostly-false-travelling-circus-of-the-european-parliament-from-brussels-to-strasbourg-costs-200-million-euros-annually/

General: students were able to produce this fact check almost independently.
Accuracy & research: they corrected wrong figures given by the checked political party.
Quality of arguments and analysis: good.
Language: sufficient.

> "Strong: the political party changed the figures on their website due to this fact check. Maybe the claim itself was not spectacular, but the fact check procedure was executed very well by our students."
>
> Participant in Output Report, May 2019

But we wouldn't be teachers if we weren't critical about our own students:

> "Poor: I found only a few factual mistakes as for example quoting wrong numbers on economic growth projections or the astonishing claim that it is impossible to check whether the world's average temperature has risen by 0.7 degrees in the last 100 years. In one case, a student tried to avoid work by choosing a very simple claim to check. Frans Timmermans has quoted a number on the gender pay gap in Germany and this number was easy to confirm. The fact check was only three paragraphs long."
>
> Participant in Output Report, May 2019

3.2.2 Blog posts

The more than 50 published blog posts definitely proved their value. We wanted the students to reflect about the process of fact checking, on the political structures of EU institutions, on the importance of democracy and citizenship, on the role of media and journalism. Some of the blog posts were intentionally written to mediamonitor a specific country (e.g. by non-EU participants from Georgia).

Moreover, we thought it very important that students could be more creative within this format and come up with 'handmade' cartoons, vlogs, podcasts and photo blogs. Underneath some examples and quotes, in which you immediately experience the surplus value of hearing young people's and journalists-to-be's commentaries.

Fig. 28: Blog post illustration created by student

Media monitoring

https://EUfactcheck.eu/blogpost/european-election-2019-and-georgian-media/
"We think that if informed properly, the Georgian audience will be less vulnerable in face of Russian anti-European propaganda and fake news. Fortunately, some of the media outlets inform the citizens on the benefits of Georgia's close relations with the EU and NATO."

The importance of fact-checking

https://EUfactcheck.eu/blogpost/blog-the-importance-of-fact-checking/
"The powerful and beautiful, but also horrible, thing with social media is that everyone gets a voice, and everyone has the chance to make their voice heard. Good or bad, true or false. Therefore, I think it's now more important than ever to fact check the things we hear, see and read in our everyday lives and on the internet. This project has made me believe that maybe fact checking was one of the most important things I learned those years in high school. And for that, I'm forever grateful."

Role of the media and journalism

https://EUfactcheck.eu/blogpost/kitchen-made-news/
"This is very misleading for us journalism students. But it's also bad for having a good substantial discussion between two opposite parties. As one newspaper tells the truth and the other tells a whole other truth, which one is the one to believe? Which one is the one to rely on? Due to these untruths, it is possible that we write wrong information in our articles and unknowingly mislead our readers and that's something we would like to avoid."

Personal process

https://EUfactcheck.eu/blogpost/is-our-relationship-to-fact-a-long-distance/
"During the last weeks work with EUfactcheck, I've dived into statements presented as facts, from politicians trying to convince others for better or worse. I've come across statements with no abutment in reality and truthful facts hidden behind questionable agendas. It has completely occupied my everyday life, trying to figure out whether a quickly presented statistic in a long read's news segment is true or false."

For the blog posts we asked the journalism lecturers' opinions as well:

How would you rate the general quality/content of the blog posts your students produced?

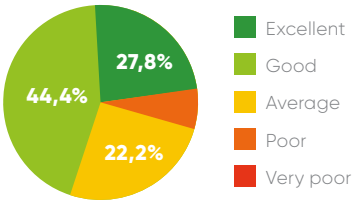


Fig.29: Question in Output Report

"Students have been working hard on the blog posts. They have been dealing with multiple sources, done extensive research and worked hard to add multimedia materials as well. "

"An example of a good blog post: https://eufactcheck.eu/blogpost/y-vote-wants-to-double-young-eu-voters/ because it is nice to read (style, well-written) and gives a different perspective (from / for young voters). The students learned a lot about EU news practices doing their research for the blog."

"A poor blog post was a report on a press conference on manipulations in the electoral campaigns. The student gave a long summary instead of selecting a thesis which she could have elaborated on."

Participants in Output Report, May 2019

Takeaways

(All main lessons learned will be mentioned in chapter 4: 'Evaluation and reflection'.)

- **It's important that coaches continuously trigger students to not go for the easiest solution, but find pleasure in analysing more in-depth facts and figures.**
- **Students should also be encouraged, at every meeting, to use and check the documents and information available: flowcharts, databases, formats, etc.**
- **The cross-nationality was an amazing plus of the project: the publications clearly showed different approaches, national themes and sensitivities but because of the strict use of the same formats of storytelling and the clear structure of the online productions, the website kept on showing coherence.**
- **It was difficult to safeguard enough variety in the themes being covered, because we deliberately didn't make any agreements on this beforehand for didactical reasons.**
- **The production team did have to intervene for language errors, layout problems, issues with featured images and the occasional factual mistake, but nearly always the content of the checks was 100% correct and accurate.**

3.3 Social media publications

Fig.30: Traffic on eufactcheck.eu Feb-May 2019

The social media production grew more organically, without really fixed formats or regulations. Even so, we did manage to publish interesting and attractive posts.

From February 2019 to end of May 2019, 112 posts reached 42,413 people on Facebook. Posts that worked particularly well in terms of engagement were fact check posts about 'popular' subjects ('Does immigration cost France too much?') and posts that promoted blog posts on the website in which students reflected on the role of fact checking and fact-based reporting ('Fact-checking can be a long and arduous process'; 'We have the right to vote. But a good vote is only possible if we get enough information about the person who will rule our country'; 'The things media can do better in addressing a far-right populist party'). We published 91 Instagram posts to 133 followers and about 90 Tweets to 231 followers, reaching 56,200 impressions.

Apart from publishing on social media we also taught the participants to start early enough to have people follow social media accounts. Early enough means before the actual contents will be spread: you need to build the network and wake interest. One way to build the network is to start following actors involved in the theme. EUfactcheck started to follow for example European Parliament Members and candidates who wanted to be one.

Takeaways

- When using social media make sure you and your team are permanently stand-by. It is not enough to only diffuse new posts: you should also be ready to react to feedback and questions from the audience and to connect the project's own content to current events. For this you need to have a particular social media rotation schedule.
- Try to constantly follow data analytics and use the information it gives: for example would there be a particular good time of the day when our audience will be reached best?
- Visual elements are crucial when trying to spread content on social media. To have visual elements that are copyright protected, you must make time to plan and schedule wisely: which visual elements will be used on the website and which elements on social media?
- For Instagram blogposts attractive and unique visuals are essential. Any unattractive or copied content is immediately discarded, whilst attractive, funny or unique content is often liked.
- For Instagram it is necessary that the publication schedule is followed otherwise the instagrammer can't continue to publish, because the format gets messed up.

"Tips and tricks: provide criteria depending on the platform (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), such as length, mentions, hashtags and visuals."

Participant in Output Report, May 2019

4 Evaluation and reflection

4.1 Reflection and lessons learned

4.1.1 Most important achievements

The high visibility and the considerable amount of quality traffic to and engagement with the website and social media were a very nice 'plus' of this project, but the main goal of EUfactcheck is still to be an educational programme.

Do we succeed in raising awareness of and hands-on knowledge and skills in fact-based reporting among generation after generation of European journalism students? That should remain our most important focus and Key Performance Indicator (KPI). At the same time, we stand by our initial choice to focus on European affairs as the general subject matter of our fact checking.

Looking back to the first phase of the project, these are the most important achievements and lessons learned (assembled from the extensive Output Report with the staff involved in the project, from occasional student surveys and from the content of the blog posts in which students reflect on their fact-checking activities):

- Students do develop a more critical approach to news and facts and a better understanding of facts.
- Students gain higher interest and insights in EU policies and reporting.
- Students recognise that fact checking requires an analytical step-by-step approach.
- Students understand that the process of fact checking is time-consuming but very rewarding.
- Students recognise the importance of context.
- Students realise they often need to work hard to find the best sources to be able to provide a final judgment on a claim.
- Students testify that fact checking is more fun than they expected: they felt they were really contributing in a 'journalistic' way, more so than with producing basic 'news articles'.
- A common methodology for fact checking is greatly appreciated by teachers as well as by students, but it shouldn't be a straitjacket for individual approaches (unity in diversity).
- Participating students and staff learned how to cooperate on (inter)national level and valued the intercultural differences within different approaches of fact checking.
- All participants see and value the uniqueness of this project, both in quantity and quality.
- To kick-start the dissemination of the project results to a wider audience, social media are indispensable. After three to four months, search traffic and, hence, SEO, become the main traffic drivers.
- All participating staff unanimously agree that fact checking needs to be an evident part of the journalism curriculum.

Fig. 31: Students during the fact-checking process (© Carien Touwen)

Some testimonials of participating students

"In times of information overload, it is good to learn how to select what is important and what is correct."

"It was interesting to see how some politicians construct a false reality out of correct bits of information."

"The project has changed my perception of news. Today, I always ask for an independent source to back up a claim."

"The project has raised my awareness of facts."

Quotes from the Output Report

"Main lessons learned: fact checking is a part of what we as journalists do and has to be a fully integrated item in our standard curriculum. It is there now, in the first and second year, but we can do way more. Students also enjoy it! They feel like real detectives, it gives them confidence."

"Main lessons learned: very good co-operative work, open lab, difficulties to adjust between different cultures, to persuade students not only to bring national topics but also ones with EU perspective."

"The biggest challenge before and during the fact-checking process was making students understand the requirement to be aware of the need to analyse not only the claims but also to look closely at who the authors or the sources of those claims were. They understood the value of taking all the needed steps to deliver a thorough fact check."

"Students learned to NOT GIVE UP - some checks needed not a cross-check but even a double cross-check."

"Students sometimes don't know where to stop (too early or too elaborate), they find it difficult to find and define claims and assess their relevance, and the level is high for first fact checks. Good way to recognise the importance of research and to develop their taste and attitude for research."

"It took much more time than we thought. Our students were first- and second-year students, so they needed lots of ongoing support. They worked in teams and they needed extra tools for teamwork and for organising their files, documents and draft texts. But to conclude, most of the students were really committed to the project. And it was satisfying for us teachers to really evaluate claims and sources together and practise logical thinking."

From the students' blog posts

Fact checking - awfully great

https://eufactcheck.eu/blogpost/blog-fact-checking-awfully-great/
"During our fact-checking process, we've learned the meaning of perseverance, when we tried calling the politicians behind the statements checked for weeks with no response. We've had to develop stamina, as we stayed up all night writing and then had to make it to early meetings the next morning. And let's not forget our poor scalps, which suffered immensely from ripping out our hair in frustration over slow progress."

How to make the world a better place

https://eufactcheck.eu/blogpost/blog-how-to-make-the-world-a-better-place/
"Students don't always like doing research but when you say they can participate in a EUfactcheck project it sounds far more exciting than 'doing research'. While research is boring in the eyes of students, fact checking can make you feel like a detective. You have to combine different pieces of a smaller or bigger puzzle, which most of the time is not easy. You have to search in documents, call people, look for experts and ask for explanation."

Copy-paste journalism

https://eufactcheck.eu/blogpost/copy-paste-journalism/
"What surprised us the most was that several other Dutch media picked up the article and published it without even checking any sources. Fact checking is a skill a modern day journalist is expected to use on a frequent basis, so why did not one of them bother to double-check whether or not the information was correct? Is it too much to ask of our professional journalists to provide unbiased, complete information?"

4.1.2 Areas of improvement

Here are some of the main areas of improvement we would like to work on in the next phases of the project:

- Courses on EU and on European affairs in general, are still gaps in the curricula of several European journalism schools. A project such as EUfactcheck could certainly contribute to fill these gaps.
- Cross-national cooperation between teachers was intense and extremely enriching during the first phase of the project. But, mainly due to resource constraints, there was not enough room to organise cross-national collaboration between students. This cross-national collaboration between students would, by itself, enhance interest in and knowledge of European affairs in general.
- To improve journalism education and curricula even more, it might be a great plan to open up this cross-national cooperation through e-learning or project weeks and summer schools.
- We hope to learn more about whether our methodology and ideas about fact checking meet the different media environments and support democratic awareness in different parts of Europe and beyond. The topic of different professional cultures and journalistic habits could be analysed thoroughly in the following phases of the project.
- In general, and exceptions notwithstanding, a lot of European journalism teachers still underestimate the power of social media, for research purposes as well as for dissemination. It would be wise to have a specific function within the coordination and production team to motivate this: a social media instigator.
- Even though the publication schedule was quite clear about the publication deadlines for fact checks and blog posts, we might need to spend more attention to the follow-up on sequences and frequency of publications on social media.
- In the first phase of the project, we limited our fact-checking efforts to written or spoken statements. In the next phases, we would very much like to include fact checking of visual material. This requires a new set of skills and methodologies.

- So far, we only published written fact checks in a fixed storytelling format. In the next phases, we could and would like to publish fact checks in video or audio too.
- Participants need to be more aware of the power of visuals, but at the same time of the rules and regulations on copyright. We need to instruct all staff and students even more strict on e.g. the use of stock images.
- We might want to stress more that blog posts should have a 'constructive approach', certainly if we wish to support the development in countries with a fragile democratic basis in the future.
- Not all participating schools cooperated closely and structurally with national fact-checking sites or journalists. We do hope to strengthen the cooperations in future, both with national sites and with international organisations.

"Students relied too much on information in the media and were not aware that they shouldn't consider everything published in the media as truth or facts."

"The difficulty was to write a good fact check, despite the fact that everyone studied the method of fact checking. I think that the problem was that they hadn't read the fact checks of the other journalism students on the website and did fact checks as a home assignment.
So, the tip for the future: to search and discuss the claims in groups of two or three, write the fact checks during the lecture, and analyse fact checks and blogs from eufactcheck.eu beforehand."

Participants in Output Report, May 2019

4.2 Future

Would you be interested to continue publishing on the eufactcheck.eu website?

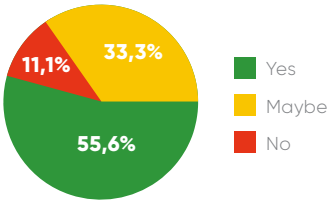


Fig. 32: Question in Output Report

After consulting the 20 participants in the first phase of the EUfactcheck project, we learned that the majority decided that the project should continue. To keep the platform alive in the transition to a new 'high productive' phase, seven journalism schools will continue publishing fact checks and blog posts from November 2019 till January 2020.

On 13 and 14 February 2020, journalism schools that are interested to participate in the next phase of EUfactcheck will gather in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in a new 'train-the-trainer' bootcamp.

At this moment (November 2019) 20 schools from 17 countries already confirmed they will be present in Ljubljana. One of the goals of the Ljubljana train-the-trainer session is to broaden the geographical scope of EUfactcheck and to include more Central and Eastern European journalism schools. During this international event we'll launch this report with lessons learned and put it forward as a guideline for the workshops and for the future phases of the project.

Based on initial interest and confirmations, we believe the EUfactcheck group will be expanded to 30-40 schools after February 2020. It is our goal to gradually keep expanding the number of participating journalism schools and the body of educational material on fact-based reporting. This means we need to consider a different organisational model for managing a project of this size.

If possible, we would very much like to stimulate and organise cross-national collaboration between journalism students. It would be a great step if this report can contribute to promote this cross-national collaboration.

"It would be wonderful to get even more publicity for this great project. Also, the lessons learned could be analysed and published. It was really motivating to work with other European teachers and feel that we are working closely together for common goals. So it would be nice to find a project like this, also as visible as this!"

"We are willing to be a support team of experts for schools that want to continue fact checking within their education."

Participants in Output Report, May 2019

"It would be interesting to expand the EUfactcheck project beyond the analysis of the European elections. Researching other European areas would contribute to broaden the scope of the fact-checking methodology that has proved so useful for this project. Establishing collaborations with other fact-checking organisations at national and international level would be clearly beneficial."

Participant in Output Report, May 2019

It is our deepest wish to move EUfactcheck from a temporal project to a permanent structure.

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Appendix 1

Letter of commitment to eufactcheck.eu project

The European Journalism Training Association wants to create, support and promote the development and active use of courses and training modules 'Fact checking' with a first output on national fact-checking platforms and a final result on a pan-European fact-checking site (EUfactcheck.eu).

With this letter the EJTA member ..... expresses its intention to join the EUfactcheck.eu project, and agrees to commit to the actions mentioned underneath.

- To create a sustainable course / module 'fact checking' in the journalism curriculum.
- To organise a national pilot in the period of spring 2018 – autumn 2018 with own funding.
- To involve journalism staff and to appoint one contact person / project leader in this project.
- To have a significant amount of Journalism students participate actively in this project.
- To engage citizens through social media and to build a network of national experts.
- To develop a national open-source fact-checking site that will be linked to the other national sites in 2019.

- To follow the suggested EJTA fact-checking methodology and approach, and the related minimum standards.
- To participate in the meetings during which the project organisation, methodology and content will be discussed.
- To cooperate with all EJTA-members of the fact-checking project in the final phase and to develop a European fact-checking office during the European parliamentary elections in 2019.

It is understood that this letter implies the Journalism school's active commitment to EUfactcheck.eu and does not imply any obligation or commitment other than stated above.

Name of the EJTA member:

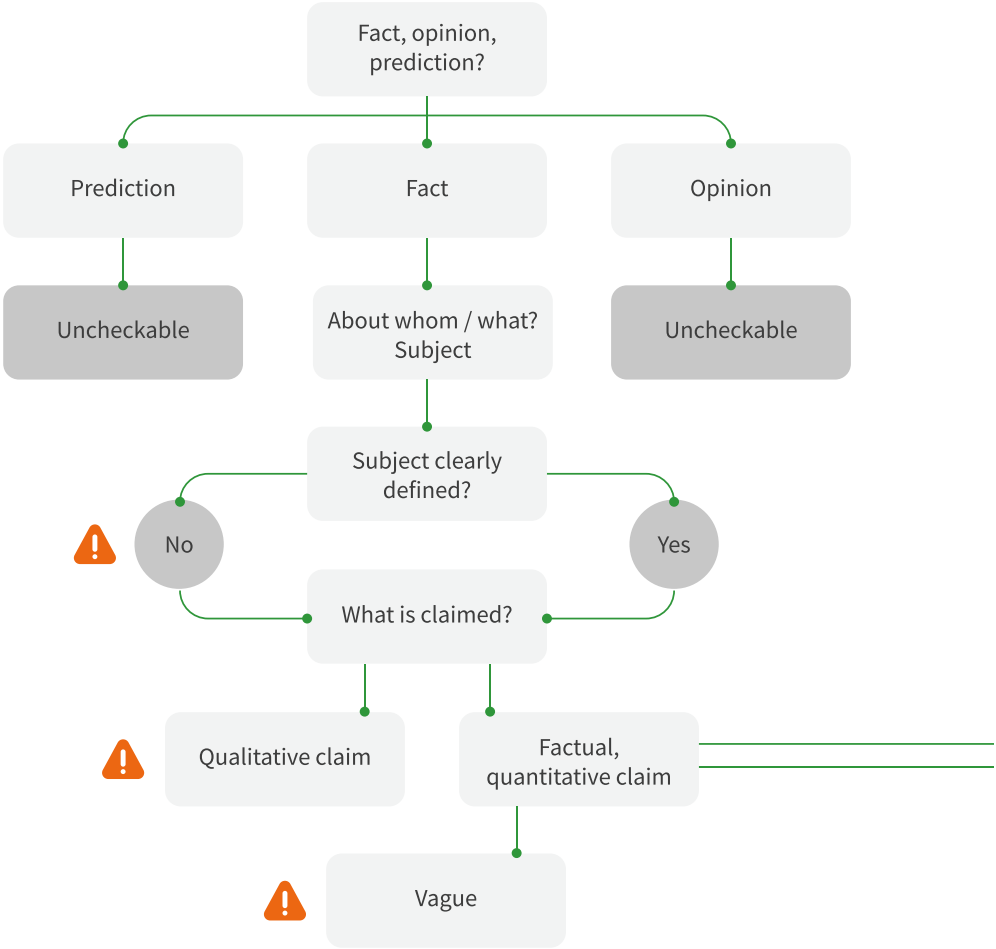
Name of the contact person:

Date:

Name, function and signature :

ejta.eu
European Journalism Training Association

Appendix 2
Analyse claim



Simplified version of the EUfactcheck flowchart.
For full size and complete version: see www.eufactcheck.eu and www.ejta.eu.

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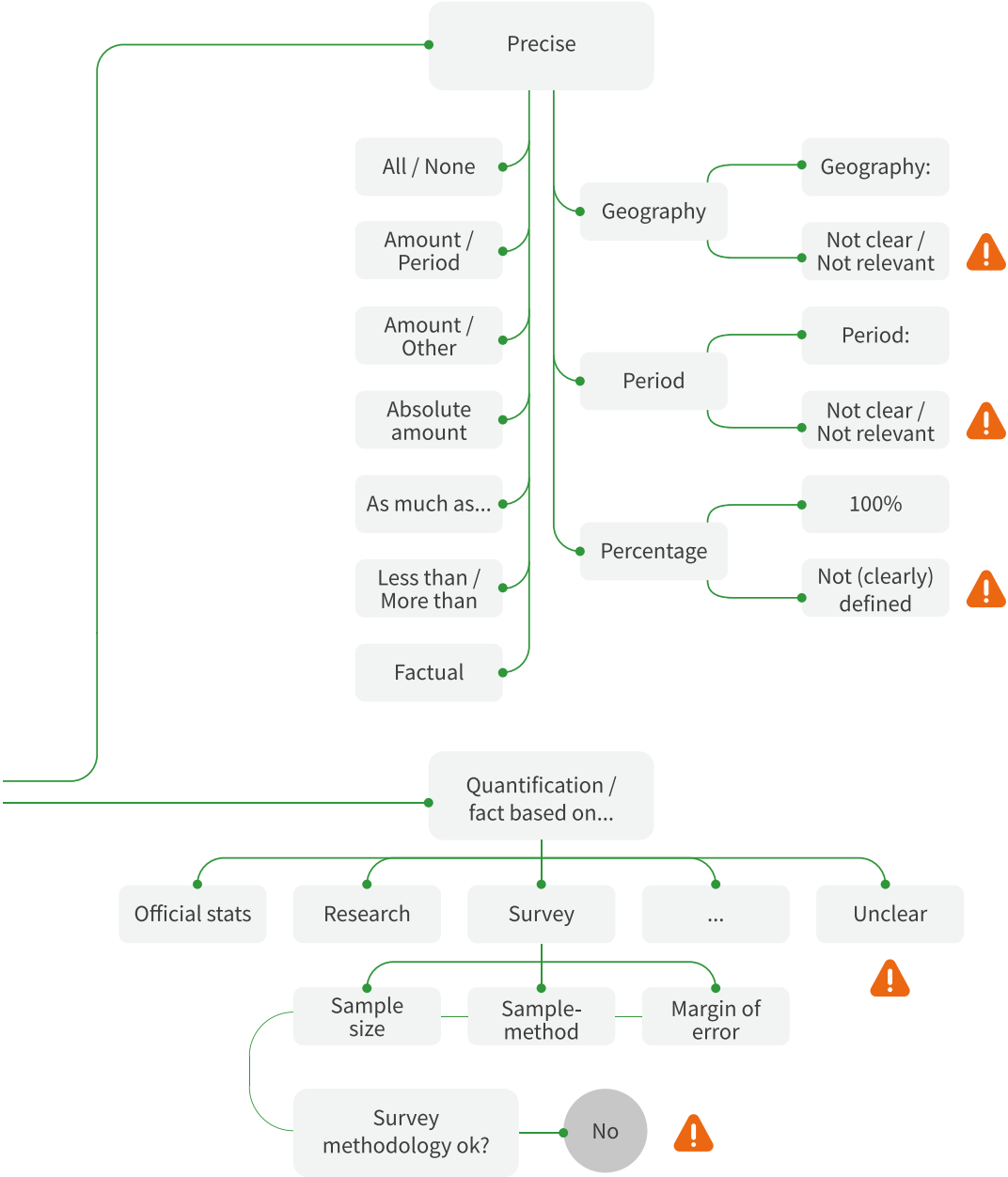
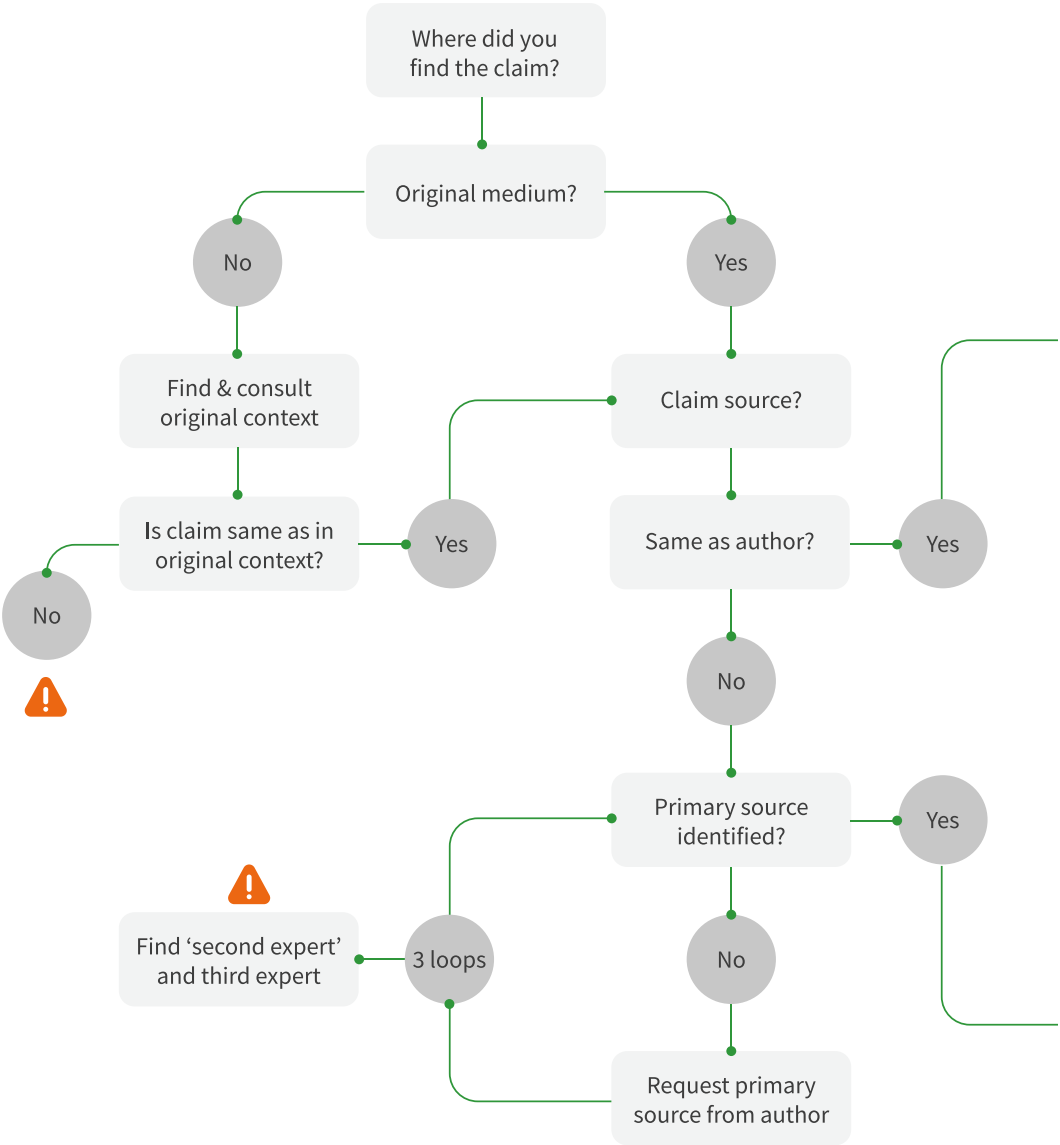

Precise
All / None
Amount / Period
Amount / Other
Absolute amount
As much as...
Less than / More than
Factual
Geography
Geography:
Not clear / Not relevant
Period
Period:
Not clear / Not relevant
Percentage
100%
Not (clearly) defined
Quantification / fact based on...
Official stats
Research
Survey
...
Unclear
Sample size
Sample-method
Margin of error
Survey methodology ok?
No

Appendix 2
Analyse author / source



Simplified version of the EUfactcheck flowchart.
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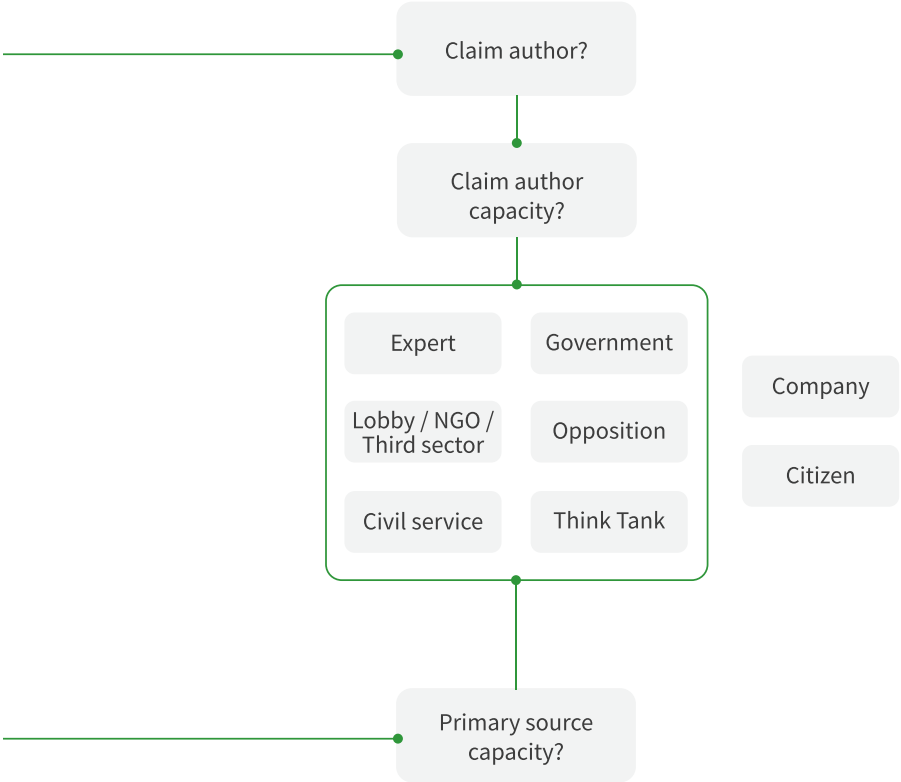
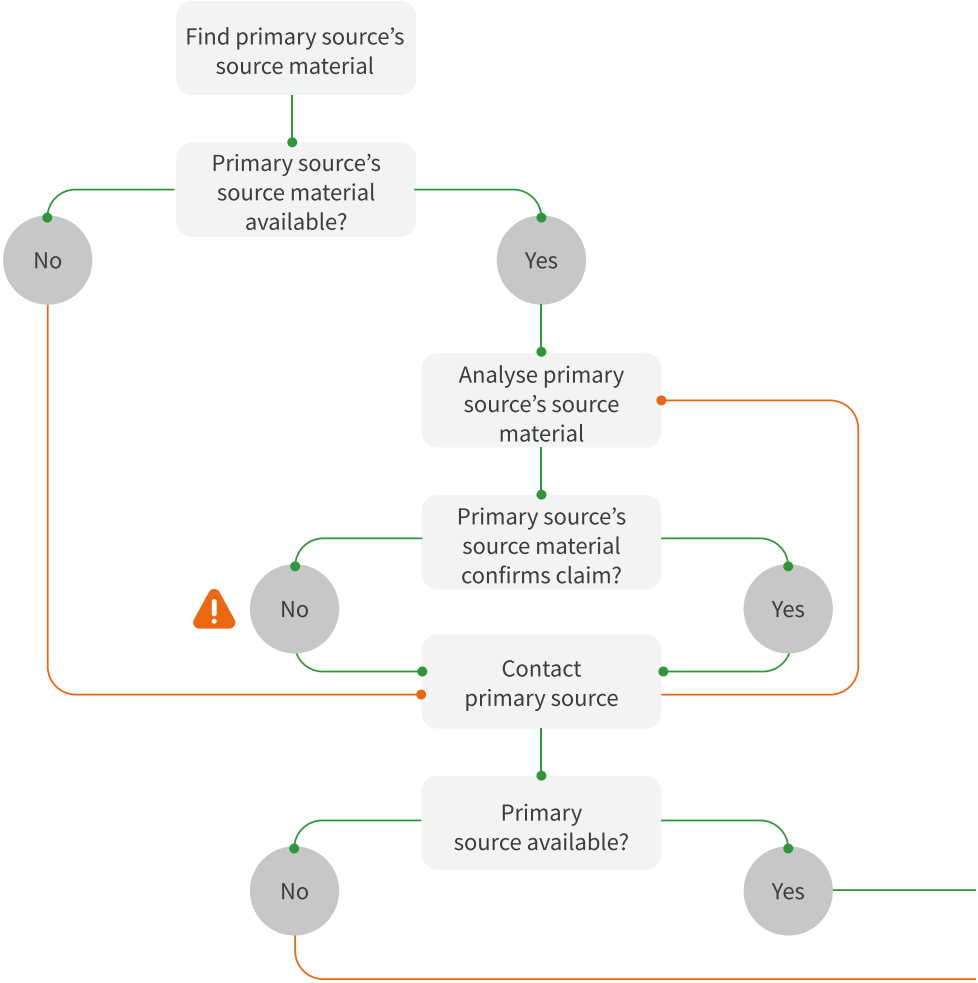


Appendix 2
Fact check



Simplified version of the EUfactcheck flowchart.
For full size and complete version: see www.eufactcheck.eu and www.ejta.eu.

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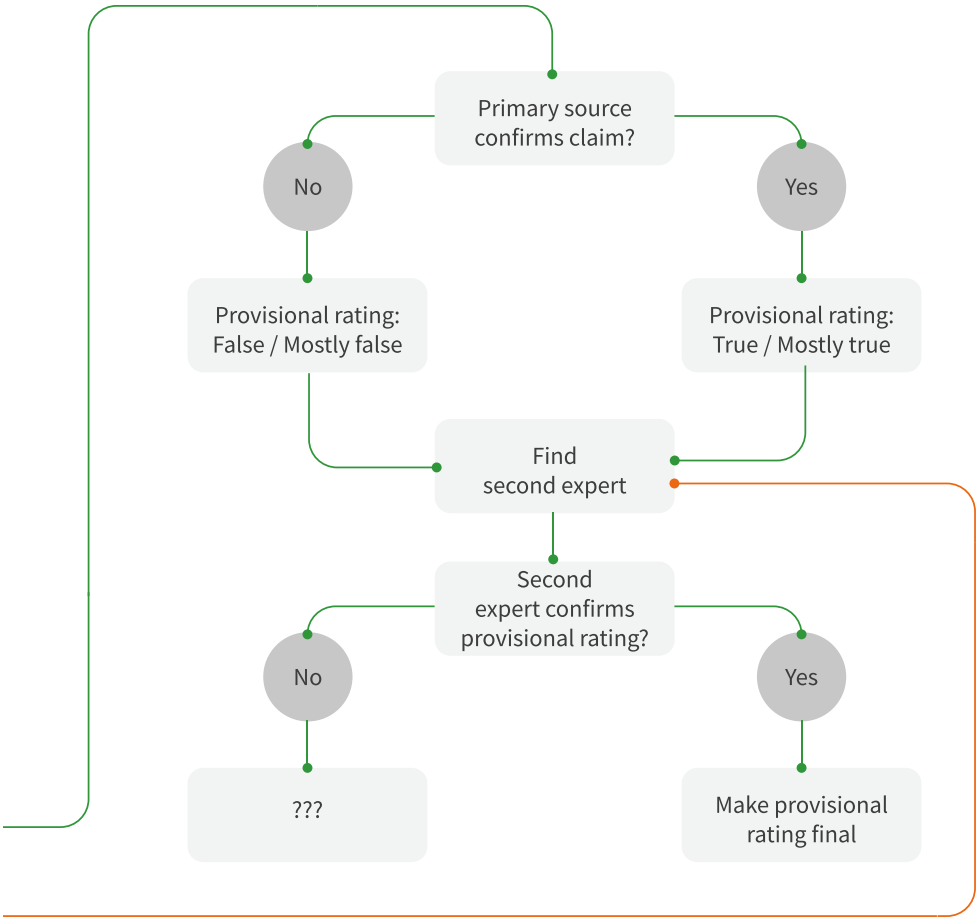
Primary source confirms claim?
No
Yes
Provisional rating: False / Mostly false
Provisional rating: True / Mostly true
Find second expert
Second expert confirms provisional rating?
No
Yes
???
Make provisional rating final

Appendix 3
Fact check flow chart

1 Analyse claim

1.1 Fact, opinion or prediction?			Warning lights
Opinion	Go to rating: Uncheckable		
Prediction	Go to rating: Uncheckable		
(If ... then) Prediction	Go to 1.2		
Fact	Go to 1.2		
1.2 About whom / what? Is subject clearly defined?			
Yes	Go to 1.3		
No	Turn on warning light and go to 1.3		☐
1.3 What is claimed?			
Qualitative claim?	Turn on warning light and go to 2		☐
Factual, quantitative claim?			
Vague?	Turn on warning light and go to 2		☐
Precise factual?	☐		
Precise quantitative?	☐		
	Indicate quantifier:		
	Percentage	☐	
	What is 100%?	100% = ...	
		Not clearly defined: turn on warning light	☐
	All / None	☐	
	Amount / Period	☐	

	Amount / Other	☐	
	Absolute amount	☐	
	As much as	☐	
	As much as:	...	
	Less than / More than	☐	
	Less than / More than:	...	
What **geography** is covered by the claim?	Geography:		
Geography not clear	Turn on warning light		☐
Geography not relevant	☐		
What **period** is covered by the claim?	Period:		
Period not clear	Turn on warning light		☐
Period not relevant	☐		
Quantification / fact based on:	Indicate (more than one possible):		
	Survey	☐	
	Sample size	...	
	Sample method	...	
	Margin of error	...	
	Survey methodology not OK	Turn on warning light	☐
	Research	☐	
	Official stats	☐	
	Other:	☐	
		...	
	Unclear	Turn on warning light	☐

2 Analyse author / source

2.1 Who is the claim's author?			Warning lights
Claim author:	...		
2.1.1 What is the claim author's capacity?			
	Expert	☐	
	Lobby / NGO / Third sector	☐	
	Government	☐	
	Opposition	☐	
	Think Tank	☐	
	Company	☐	
	Citizen	☐	
2.1.2 What is the claim author's affiliation?			
Affiliation:	...		

2.2 In which medium did you find the claim?			
Medium:	...		
Is that the original medium?	Yes	Go to 2.3	
	No	find and consult original context	
Is claim same as in original context?	Yes	Go to 2.3	
	No	Turn on warning light	☐

2.3 Who / what is the claim's primary source?			Warning lights
Same as author	☐		
Is the primary source identified?	Yes		
	No		
2.3.1 Request primary source from author (3 attempts)			
If no primary source is identified after 3 attempts, turn on warning light			☐
2.3.2 Primary source			
Primary source:	...		
2.3.2.1 What is the primary source's capacity?			
	Expert	☐	
	Lobby / NGO / Third sector	☐	
	Government	☐	
	Opposition	☐	
	Think Tank	☐	
	Company	☐	
	Citizen	☐	
2.3.2.2 What is the primary source's affiliation?			
Affiliation:	...		

3 Fact check

3.1 Find primary source's source material			Warning lights
Is primary source's source material available?	No	Contact primary source, request primary source's source material and go to 3.2	
	Yes	Go to 3.2	
3.2 Analyse primary source's source material			
Does primary source's source material confirm claim?	Yes	Go to 3.3	
	No	Turn on warning light and go to 3.3	☐
3.3 Contact primary source			
Is primary source available?	No	Go to 3.4	
	Yes	Go to 3.3.1	
3.3.1 Does primary source confirm claim?			
	Yes	Provisional rating true ☐	
		Provisional rating mostly true ☐	
	No	Provisional rating false ☐	
		Provisional rating mostly false ☐	
False		☐	
3.4 Find & contact second expert			
3.4.1 Does second expert confirm provisional rating?			
	Yes	Provisional rating final	
	No	Uncheckable or Contact third expert	

4 Final rating

True ☐	Mostly true ☐	Mostly false ☐	False ☐

5 Summary of warning lights and shaky claim rating

Phase	Warning lights	Implication of warning light	Action
Analyse claim	Subject not clearly defined	Shaky claim	Check with primary source
	Qualitative claim	Depends on primary source's and second expert's judgment	
	Factual, quantitative claim, but vague	Shaky claim	Check with primary source
	Percentage: 100% not (clearly) defined	Shaky claim	Check with primary source
	Geography not clear / not relevant	Shaky claim	Check with primary source
	Period not clear / not relevant	Shaky claim	Check with primary source
	Quantification / fact based on...: not clear	Shaky claim	Check with primary source
	Survey methodology	Shaky claim	Check with primary source
Analyse source	Primary source not identified	Shaky claim OR Uncheckable	Check with primary source
	Claim in original context is different	Shaky claim	Check with primary source
Fact check	Primary source material does NOT confirm claim	Shaky claim	Check with primary source

Shaky claim rating: /11

EU factcheck.eu
POWERED BY EJTA

This handbook wants to describe the organisation, methodology and lessons learned of EUfactcheck, the pedagogical fact-checking project powered by the European Journalism Training Association. The project's aim is to raise awareness of the importance of fact-based reporting with journalists-to-be. With the creation of a common methodology and a unique tool: the EUfactcheck flowchart, we focus on the basic competences students of journalism ought to require to analytically check information brought to the public. Students from 20 pan-European journalism schools checked claims by politicians and public figures in mainstream and social media in the run-up to the 2019 European Parliamentary elections.

With these practical guidelines we want to spread the EUfactcheck methodology, hoping our lessons learned (by trial and error) provide takeaways and valuable input for staff and students of journalism and other institutions all over the world.

In part I of this report 'How to organise a multinational fact-checking project with a large group of journalism schools' the detailed description of the project's process is to be found: history, management and lessons learned. In part II 'How to organise a fact-checking module in the journalism curriculum' we focus on the pedagogical approach and methodology used during the project's first production phase (January-June 2019).

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