

THE EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY SHIELD

Policy briefing

Weblink	https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/european-democracy-shield-and-eu-strategy-civil-society-pave-way-stronger-and-more-resilient
Relevance	☐ National policy ☐ EU policy ☒ other: EU initiative
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Short summary of the policy

The European Democracy Shield is a comprehensive EU initiative launched in November 2025 by the European Commission and the European External Action Service to protect democratic processes from foreign interference, disinformation, and hybrid threats. It employs a whole-of-society approach to safeguard information integrity, secure elections, and promote active citizen participation.

The European Democracy Shield operates across three main pillars:

- **Information Integrity:** Combats foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI), tackles deepfakes and generative AI threats, and enforces strict rules on political advertising. It heavily utilizes the Digital Services Act (DSA) to hold large online platforms accountable.
- **Institutions & Media:** Protects media freedom, counters the growing threat of SLAPP lawsuits (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) against journalists, and enforces transparent, secure electoral processes.
- **Societal Resilience:** Empowers citizens and civil society through enhanced digital literacy and civic engagement programs.

A core component of the initiative is the newly established European Centre for Democratic Resilience. This hub facilitates information exchange between EU institutions, Member States, and civil society organizations to anticipate and respond to emerging threats to democratic integrity.

The European Democracy Shield will contribute to strengthening our democracies and empowering Europeans to exercise their rights, to freely form and express their opinions, and to have agency and participate in the democratic life of the Union actively and safely.

Main objectives of the policy

The main objective of the European Democracy Shield is to protect democratic processes within the European Union from foreign interference, disinformation, and hybrid threats:

- **Protect Integrity:** Secure elections and democratic institutions from foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI).
- **Enforce Accountability:** Hold major digital platforms responsible for the spread of malicious content.
- **Support Media:** Shield journalists and independent media from intimidation and legal harassment.
- **Build Resilience:** Empower citizens through media literacy and civic participation to resist democratic threats.

Context and relation to the Digital Europe Programme (DEP)

Financial support is key to achieving the priorities of the European Democracy Shield in the immediate and long term. While the European Democracy Shield is a high level strategy aiming to protect democracies from foreign interference, DEP provides funding, infrastructure and technical tools to facilitate its objectives as for example in the following areas:

- **Fact-Checking:** DEP funds independent networks assisting the Shield's anti-disinformation efforts, such as the European Digital Media Observatory and the European Network of Fact-Checkers.
- **Building Technical Infrastructure for Information Integrity:** DEP funds the creation of a common EU research framework and advanced infrastructure to analyze information manipulation.
- **Scaling AI and Cybersecurity Capacities:** The European Democracy Shield relies heavily on advanced technologies to combat deepfakes, AI-driven voter manipulation, and cyberattacks on election systems. DEP builds these defensive capabilities by strategically investing in EU cybersecurity, supercomputing, and sovereign AI systems.

Parts of the policy directly related to specific objectives (SO) in DEP

The scope and objectives of the European Democratic Shield align with several SOs of DEP by addressing key areas of AI, Cybersecurity, as well as Trust in Digital Technologies.

SO2: AI Continent

- **Safeguarding the integrity of the information space:** The initiative focuses on countering disinformation, foreign information manipulation, and deepfakes by deploying robust AI-driven content detectors and synthetic content labeling frameworks.
- **Facilitating data sharing:** The initiative provides for the foundation of the European Centre for Democratic Resilience, which will facilitate information sharing and support operational cooperation and capacity building to withstand evolving common threats.
- **Funding interventions:** Challenges and threats posed by the development of generative AI are addressed by the initiative as it provides for the review of the Directive on copyright in the Digital Single Market by the commission.

SO3: Cybersecurity

- **Cybersecurity Blueprint:** To prevent major incidents and interference in the information environment, the Commission will prepare a DSA incidents and crisis protocol to facilitate coordination among relevant authorities.
- **Strengthening the fairness and integrity of electoral and other democratic processes:** To ensure free and fair elections, election-related infrastructure needs to be protected against cyber-attacks. The NIS2 Directive and Cyber Resilience Act strengthen the EU's cybersecurity by ensuring that both critical sectors and digital products are secure, resilient, and coordinated by design across the EU.

SO5: Deployment and Best Use of Digital Capacities and Interoperability

- **Expanding Advanced Fact-Checking Capacity:** A Stakeholder Platform for independent non-institutional stakeholders will be established to enable contributions from a broad set of relevant stakeholders and communities.
- **Media literacy actions beyond education:** A Media Resilience Programme will include new actions to support media literacy. It will address challenges of information integrity, linking media literacy to preparedness and focusing on new trends in terms of media consumption.

Activities in the DEP Work Programme 2025-27 contributing to the objectives of the policy

Topics contributing to the objectives of the European Democracy Shield are especially found under Specific Objective 5, especially under 5.2 Confidence in Digital transformation:

- **DIGITAL-2025-BESTUSE-08-NETWORKSICs** - Network of Safer Internet Centres (SICs)
- **DIGITAL-2026-BESTUSE-TECH-EDMO-09-HUBS** - European Digital Media Observatory Hubs
- **DIGITAL-2026-BESTUSE-10-NETWORKSICs** - Ensuring comprehensive geographical coverage of the Network of Safer Internet Centres (SICs)
- **DIGITAL-2025-BESTUSE-08-FACTCHECKERS** - European Network of Factcheckers
- **DIGITAL-2026-BESTUSE-RSF-10-AWARENESS** - Research Support Framework for Situational Awareness on information integrity

Related policies and further information

- Digital Services Act (DSA)
- AI Act
- European Media Freedom Act (EMFA)
- Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD)
- Transparency and Targeting of Political Advertising (TTPA)
- European Cooperation Network on Elections
- EU Strategy for Civil Society
- Critical Entities Resilience (CER) Directive
- NIS2 Directive