Climate Change Disinformation

Bi-annual report

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Contents

Introduction

This document is the second report produced within the framework of the Adaptation AGORA project[1], focusing on the state of climate change disinformation during the second half of 2024 (July–December). Published as part of the Digital Academy against Climate Change Disinformation[2], it aims to provide a clear snapshot of how climate-related false claims evolved during this period and how organisations monitoring the information space responded to them. As with the first report, the aim is not to capture every incident in full detail, but to illustrate the trends, signals, and patterns that shaped the landscape of climate change disinformation in Europe.

The report is divided into two parts. The first section examines the current state of climate change disinformation by drawing primarily on material from EDMO's Fact-checking Monthly Briefs, as well as fact-checks published by organisations within the EDMO and EFCSN networks. This section reflects what fact-checkers encountered in practice: the narratives that reappeared most consistently, how they travelled between platforms, and the pace at which they circulated. The second section provides a more theoretical perspective, presenting recent academic research related to disinformation in the climate field, helping place the observed trends within a broader context.

What stands out in this reporting period is the growing recognition, at an international level, of how urgent the issue has become. In late 2024, the United Nations, together with UNESCO and the Brazilian government, launched the Global Initiative for Information Integrity on Climate Change, signalling a stronger global commitment to address this problem[3]. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres stated, the initiative will "*work with researchers and partners to strengthen action against climate disinformation*", adding that "*coordinated disinformation campaigns are impeding global progress on climate change*". UNESCO's Director-General Audrey Azoulay reinforced this position, noting that "*without access to reliable information about this existential challenge, we can never hope to overcome it.*"

[1] https://adaptationagora.eu/
[2] https://agoraclimatedisinfo.eu/
[3] https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/11/1157191

Against this backdrop, it is clear that climate change disinformation is no longer seen as a marginal issue. It directly affects climate policy, public understanding, and societal trust. This report aims to contribute to that ongoing effort by documenting what was visible on the ground, what has changed since the previous reporting period, and what remains a challenge as we move into 2025.

1. The state of climate change disinformation

By Spyridoula Markou, Athens Technology Center

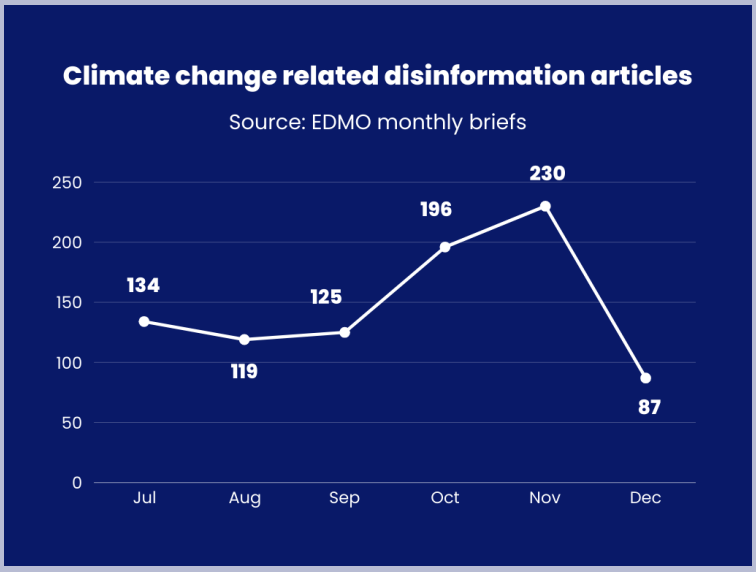
Adam Doulgerakis, Athens Technology Center

In this section, we focus on the climate change disinformation narratives that circulated between July and December 2024. Our review is based on material from the EDMO Fact-checking Monthly Briefs, along with fact-checks published by organisations that are part of the EDMO and EFCSN networks. By looking at these sources together, we were able to follow which narratives appeared most frequently, how they evolved month by month, and which themes continued to resurface across countries and platforms.

Rather than relying on a single source, the aim was to observe patterns: what claims were repeated, how they were framed, and in which contexts they gained visibility. This approach allowed us to identify the narratives that shaped the information space during this period, without overstating conclusions or assuming evidence we do not have. The result is not a comprehensive map, but a clear indication of trends that were strong enough to be noticed by multiple fact-checking actors across Europe.

EDMO data shows 9% climate narrative presence in second half of 2024

From July to December 2024, climate change disinformation remained a consistent part of the European information landscape, even though the level of activity shifted month by month. On average, around 9% of all fact-checking articles produced during this period focused on climate-related claims, reflecting a steady presence rather than isolated spikes. These figures are based on data collected through the EDMO Monthly Briefs.



The summer months began at relatively moderate levels: July recorded 134 articles (8%), followed by a slight drop in August with 119 (7%) and September with 125 (7%). October reached 196 articles (11%), and November became the clear peak with 230 articles (13%), the highest monthly share in this six-month window. The level then fell sharply in December to 87 articles (6%), although more than thirty organisations still contributed data that month.

In total, fact-checkers produced 891 climate-related articles out of 10,265 fact checks, with between 30 and 36 organisations providing monthly data. Even with fluctuations, the overall pattern suggests that climate narratives never fully disappear from the public sphere; they simply rise and fall in line with wider political, seasonal, and media attention.

Climate-related fact-checking in 2024: first vs second half

Comparing the available data in the EDMO Monthly Briefs shows that the second half of 2024 recorded around 100 more articles addressing claims related to climate change disinformation than the first half (approximately 790 in January-June compared to 891 in July-December). In the first period, the highest monthly total was reported in April (185 articles), while in the second period the peak occurred in November (230 articles).

What can be observed from the data is that months with higher fact-checking output correspond to periods in which more false or misleading climate-related claims circulated. Some of these periods also overlap with extreme weather events and natural disasters, when misleading content appeared to spread more rapidly online. While this does not establish direct causation, the timing suggests that these conditions contributed to an increase in climate-related misinformation and, consequently, a greater number of fact-checking articles.

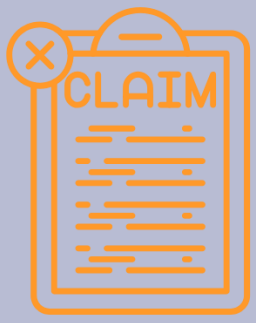
1.1 Climate change disinformation narratives

This section focuses on the main narratives connected to climate change disinformation that have appeared in the European information space. The material comes from monitoring carried out by organisations and observatories based in Europe, which follow how misleading claims spread online and in the media. The points collected here were grouped by how often they appeared and by the themes that kept resurfacing.

What stands out is that the disinformation is not limited to single false claims. It usually mixes several lines of argument: rejecting the role of human activity in global warming, suggesting that the situation is exaggerated, introducing conspiracy theories about controlling the weather, or using extreme events to create suspicion towards institutions. Floods, fires, and storms are regularly framed as evidence of hidden agendas or as proof that authorities are either ineffective or acting intentionally against the public interest.

These narratives matter because they don't just create confusion around facts. They also weaken trust in scientific work, damage confidence in public institutions, and can make it harder for societies to support adaptation and mitigation policies. In other words, the issue is not only what is being claimed, but how these claims are used. They contribute to a climate of doubt at a moment when clear information and coordinated action are needed.

Some of these narratives are not new. Similar patterns already appeared in our first report for the initial semester of 2024, which indicates continuity and a degree of repetition rather than isolated incidents. Their re-appearance here suggests that certain themes have become stable reference points for climate-related disinformation. The next section breaks these narratives down by theme.



Denial of human influence on climate change

As in the previous report, we again identify claims that challenge or reject the scientific consensus that human activity is driving global warming. These narratives suggest that CO_2 has no real impact on temperature[4], that natural cycles[5] or geological processes alone explain climate changes, or that older temperature records[6] supposedly "prove" there is no significant warming. In other cases, the argument shifts to stating that warming rates have remained the same since the 1970s or that glaciers, sea levels, and ice melt[7] do not indicate concerning trends.

[4] https://faktencheck.afp.com/doc.afp.com.34KD3GG
[5] https://kallkritikbyran.se/nej-solcykler-forklarar-inte-dagens-globala-uppvarmning/
[6] https://meddmo.eu/el/oi-ypshles-thermokrasies-tou-1965-den-anairoun-thn-klimatikh-allagh/
[7] https://gadmo.eu/der-klimawandel-ist-auf-den-malediven-stark-sprbar/

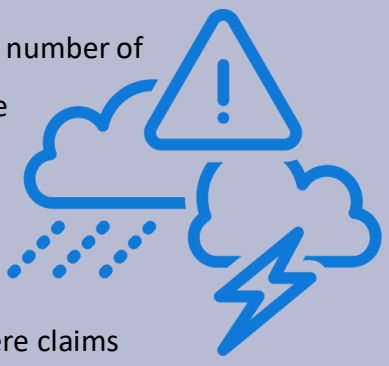
Claims that there is no climate emergency

Another group of narratives attempts to normalise the crisis by suggesting there is no emergency at all. These stories often misuse isolated weather events, especially temporary cold spells or individual historic floods[8], to claim that the current situation is not exceptional. They imply that extreme weather records are exaggerated and that environmental data is manipulated to "create panic."

Attacks on climate science and expertise

A recurring line of disinformation targets scientific bodies such as the IPCC[9], meteorological agencies[10], and academic researchers[11]. These stories claim that climate science is politically motivated, that graphs and data have been intentionally distorted, or that experts are hiding real measurements. In some cases, niche studies or out-of-context statements are promoted as supposed "proof" that mainstream science is incorrect.

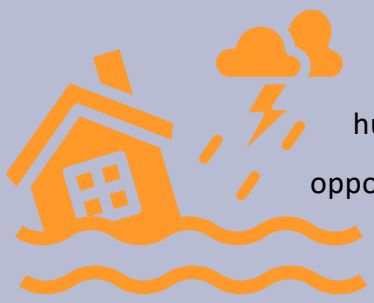
Weather manipulation and geoengineering conspiracies



As noted in the previous report, we continue to see a substantial number of narratives built around conspiracy theories claiming deliberate manipulation of the climate. These stories refer to ideas involving HAARP[12], chemtrails[13], radar antennas[14], 5G networks, or alleged government programmes that supposedly control storms, trigger droughts, or cause floods. Additionally, there were claims

[8] https://gadmo.eu/einzelne-historische-hochwasserereignisse-entkrften-nicht-den-klimawandel/
[9] https://belux.edmo.eu/lb/faktencheck-de-weltklimarot-gouf-als-reaktioun-op-dglobal-erwiermung-gegrnnt/
[10] https://www.knack.be/factcheck/factcheck-nee-spaans-meteorologisch-agentschap-heeft-niet-toegegeven-dat-spanje-besproeid-wordt-om-het-weer-te-manipuleren/
[11] https://provjeracinjenica.afp.com/doc.afp.com.36FE7YH
[12] https://rebaltica.lv/2024/04/kas-ir-haarp-un-vai-tas-ir-saistits-ar-5g/
[13] https://defacto-observatoire.fr/Medias/Factuel/Fact-checks/Attention-cette-ancienne-video-d-une-conference-organisee-par-l-ONU-ne-prouve-pas-l-existence-des-chemtrails/
[14] https://gadmo.eu/nein-mit-radaranlagen-und-mobilfunkmasten-lsst-sich-nicht-das-wetter-beeinflussen/

suggesting that hurricanes in the United States were being manipulated[15] and that droughts were caused by military technologies[16].



Instrumentalisation of climate disasters

As observed in the previous report, major disasters, such as hurricanes, floods, droughts, and fires, continue to be used as an opportunity to spread false claims. These narratives often blame governments[17], the EU[18], or foreign actors[19] for intentionally causing the events, delaying emergency responses, concealing casualty numbers or failing to assist the local population. At the same time, older footage, unrelated material, and in some cases AI-generated videos are circulated again, feeding panic and distrust during moments when accurate information is most needed.

Discrediting climate policies and international action

A further set of narratives focuses on undermining climate policies[20] by presenting them as economically destructive, authoritarian, or useless. These stories frame emissions reduction measures as an attack on citizens' freedoms, agriculture, or national identity. At the international level, climate summits and global agreements are depicted as corrupt projects controlled by elites, international organisations, or private interests.

Politicisation and Foreign Information Manipulation (FIMI)

Climate disinformation is increasingly linked with geopolitics. Climate disasters are framed as opportunities to blame migrants, foreign governments, or EU institutions, combining climate narratives with polarising rhetoric. In some cases, domestic political actors use extreme

[15] https://gadmo.eu/hurrikan-helene-ist-nicht-ganz-pltzlich-aufgetaucht-anders-als-online-behauptet-wird/
[16] https://brodhub.eu/ro/media/factual/fals-rachetele-antigrindina-produc-seceta/
[17] https://cedmohub.eu/pl/rzad-celowo-wywolal-powodz-sprawdzamy-spiskowa-teorie/
[18] https://factchecknederland.afp.com/doc.afp.com.36GY79D
[19] https://demagog.cz/diskuze/nic-nedam-nic-nemam-pribeh-o-lhostejnych-ukrajincich-je-smysleny
[20] https://www.logicallyfacts.com/en/fact-check/misleading-video-does-not-show-french-farmers-protesting-government-climate-policy

weather events to accuse opponents of incompetence or sabotage, while foreign channels amplify these claims to deepen distrust.

1.2 Climate change narratives connected to industry interests

n our previous report, we referred to research suggesting that fossil fuel industries have engaged with the climate debate in ways that influence how the public understands their role in the transition. Rather than relying on explicit or open forms of denial, the communication style described in these studies presents such actors as constructive participants in climate solutions. By promoting "low-carbon" pathways or framing fossil fuels as necessary for economic and energy stability, they are able to remain positioned within discussions about future planning, while potentially slowing or redirecting expectations around the pace of policy change.

The Pulitzer Center's Drilled podcast series, including the investigation "Denial to Delay"[21], provides a clear example of how this strategy operates. It documents the collaboration between fossil fuel companies, consultancy firms, and public relations networks that create narratives appearing climate-friendly on the surface, but which ultimately work to preserve the status quo. Instead of disputing climate science directly, the messaging shifts towards selective framing, technological optimism, and solutions that continue to rely on oil and gas.

According to the podcasts, this is described as a more refined form of climate-related misrepresentation. Rather than denying the issue outright, it is portrayed as being reframed in ways that could slow momentum for structural action or weaken support for adaptation efforts. The claim made is that such narratives appear reasonable on the surface, which can make their implications harder to assess and complicate efforts to maintain public confidence in long-term climate planning.

[21] https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/podcast-denial-delay

1.3 AI and climate change disinformation

The growing use of generative AI is changing the information landscape in a way that many organisations working on climate change disinformation is already feeling in practice. Tools like ChatGPT or Gemini are not designed to spread false claims about the climate, but real-world examples show that, with the right kind of prompting, they can still produce text that sounds convincing and knowledgeable enough to pass as reliable. The problem isn't just the output itself -it's the speed at which this content enters social media, where algorithms tend to reward whatever gets attention rather than whatever is accurate.

This creates a real challenge for the people who try to keep the information space clean. AI-generated climate content often looks polished and trustworthy at first glance, so it takes longer to check and debunk, while the misleading version is already being shared at high speed. By the time fact-checkers have something ready, the narrative may have already reached thousands of users. It's not that their work becomes less valuable. It just becomes harder to keep up, because the pace of misinformation now moves faster than the pace of correction.

At the same time, it would be unfair to say that AI is only part of the problem. Reports like Artificial Intelligence for Climate Action in Developing Countries: Opportunities, Challenges and Risks (UNFCCC)[22] shows that the same technology could actually support climate action if used responsibly. AI can help detect misleading narratives sooner, flag suspicious claims before they blow up, and assist fact-checkers in putting together clear, evidence-based responses. So, the key question isn't "Is AI good or bad?", but rather "In whose hands is it, and under what rules does it operate?". With transparency, accountability, and basic safeguards, AI can be part of the solution, not just another accelerant for climate misinformation.

[22] https://www.preventionweb.net/publication/artificial-intelligence-climate-action-developing-countries-opportunities-challenges

2. Comprehensive review of research on climate change disinformation

By Dmitry Erokhin, PhD, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis

Nadejda Komendantova, PhD, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis

This review synthesizes findings from 25 studies published between July and December 2024[23], which can be grouped into several major themes: institutional and policy responses, cognitive and psychological dynamics, media and communication strategies, and technological/algorithmic interventions. The studies were selected from the Web of Science database and included the topics of (climate change) and [(misinformation) or (disinformation) or (hoax) or (fake news) or (conspiracy)]. Only relevant English language open-access studies were considered.

Institutions, policy, and public trust

Public authorities have generally treated misinformation as a secondary issue. Moyano et al. (2024) show that Argentina and Spain mostly responded to health disinformation in a reactive manner, with little integration of environmental determinants like climate change, limited attention to vulnerable groups, and low institutional prioritization. Their analysis highlights that policy responses rarely linked health misinformation to broader climate or environmental risks, despite growing dangers during climate crises. From the perspective of transitions to sustainable societies, Nguyen et al. (2024) argue that decision-makers and practitioners should promote sustainability guidance through diverse channels and media formats, while actively countering misinformation. Graton et al. (2024) generalize COVID-19 lessons for climate policy and recommend prebunking, community leadership, and building legitimacy to counter conspiracies and inequities that erode cooperation.

Polarization adds to these governance challenges. In the U.S., Rekker (2024) finds that factual belief polarization around climate can match or even surpass ideological divides. In

[23] In determining eligibility for the July-December 2024 window, the first online publication date was used. Some articles were subsequently assigned to later journal issues (e.g., 2025).

Austria, Hofmann (2024) links radical populism to stronger conspiracy beliefs, including climate denial, while Pfadenhauer et al. (2024) show how mainstream science skepticism during vaccine debates signals likely resistance to interventionist sustainability policies. Curnock et al. (2024) identify shared values that can help bridge science mistrust in the Great Barrier Reef region, emphasizing the need for transparent, participatory communication and inclusive engagement

Cognition, epistemology, and conspiracy

Misbelief is not simply a product of laziness. Robson et al. (2024) find that believers in implausible claims can still discriminate between high- and low-quality evidence, challenging the idea that they are "cognitive misers" and instead pointing to factors like motivated reasoning and distrust of experts. Personal experience also matters. Chan et al. (2024) show that feeling hotter summers can reduce belief in climate hoax narratives, though results for objective temperature anomalies are mixed. At the behavioral level, Thieme et al. (2024) demonstrate that conspiracy beliefs about climate change disrupt the value-belief-norm chain, leading to less energy-efficient behavior.

Taking a broader view, Kirmayer (2024) frames the crisis as one of social epistemology, where deliberate disinformation campaigns, echo chambers, and social media dynamics undermine public trust. He calls for solutions that combine literacy with institutional reforms to model transparency, accountability, and tolerance for uncertainty, along with social practices that foster mutual recognition and pluralism. Lewandowsky et al. (2024) clarify the line between error and deceit, arguing that empirical criteria can distinguish intentional disinformation from mere disagreement underscoring the need for prebunking, fact-checking, and platform accountability.

Communication that works (and why misinformation spreads)

Higher-presence communication formats are more effective. Dan & Coleman (2025) show that video fact-checks outperform text, especially among those with false or uncertain beliefs about climate change. In Turkey and the Netherlands, Erisen et al. (2024) find that VR simulations reduce skepticism and reliance on misinformation more effectively than text-based social media posts. On a global scale, Većkalov et al. (2024) confirm that consensus

messaging (e.g., 97% of climate scientists agree) reliably reduces misperceptions and modestly increases belief and concern, though policy-support effects are smaller than belief/worry effects.

Bruns et al. (2024) tested prebunking versus debunking against three climate misinformation claims in realistic news-style articles across four EU countries. Both strategies reduced belief, perceived credibility, and supportive sharing of misinformation. Debunking had a slight overall advantage for lowering agreement and pro-misinformation sharing, while prebunking matched debunking on credibility but not on sharing.

Baissa et al. (2025) explain why falsehoods spread so rapidly. Fake climate news are constructed around classic news values like negativity, unexpectedness, consonance, and facticity, which drive virality more than factual reporting does. A concrete example is given by Winter et al. (2024) who document widespread public agreement with wind farm myths across the U.S., UK, and Australia. Agreement with these claims correlates with conspiracist worldviews and predicts lower policy support and greater protest intentions. On social platforms, Poelzer (2024) uses a corpus of top retweets to evaluate thematic frames and the extent of polarization in Arctic climate-change discussions on X (Twitter), situating the findings within broader concerns about factual belief polarization online.

Community capacity also plays a role. Corsi & Seger (2024) show that decentralized, community-based soft moderation on Reddit often down-ranks low-credibility climate links in science-oriented subreddits, though the effects vary over time and across communities.

Platforms, automation, and early warning

Detection is improving on both content and actor fronts. Zanartu et al. (2024) train models to spot rhetorical fallacies in climate denial by merging the Computer Assisted Recognition of Denial and Skepticism (CARDS) taxonomy with the Fake experts, Logical fallacies, Impossible expectations, Cherry-picking, Conspiracy theories (FLICC) technique framework, outperforming previous baselines and advancing toward automated, nuanced, technique-based corrections. At the platform level, Rojas et al. (2024) use an enhanced augmented CARDS model to reveal that conspiracy and ad hominem attacks dominate contrarian content on Twitter, with spikes during political events and disasters. On the actor side, Sánchez-Corcuera et al. (2024) propose a dynamic graph deep-learning model for early detection of

potentially malicious users, substantially improving predictive performance and enabling preemptive mitigation of misinformation campaigns.

Education, media literacy, and algorithm literacy

Adolescents demonstrate partial awareness of platform mechanics. Kresin et al. (2025) find that German 10th-graders can describe filter bubbles, echo chambers, bots, microtargeting, and shadow-banning, but many of their conceptions are incomplete underscoring the need for explicit instruction in media and algorithm literacy linked to climate topics.

Markets, greenwashing, and claims

Misinformation also takes the form of misleading marketing. Parastatidou & Chatzis (2024) analyze vague climate-neutral or eco-friendly claims and introduce the Sustainability Meta-Indicator (SmI), which incorporates supply-chain performance to reveal outsourced impacts and expose deceptive corporate sustainability narratives, especially in agrifood sectors. This approach can strengthen consumer trust and inform policymaking against greenwashing.

Cross-cutting takeaways

The reviewed studies support an integrated approach to combatting climate change related misinformation. Coupling governance legitimacy and trust-building with high-presence corrective communication, community and platform-level moderation, fallacy-aware and early-warning machine learning, education, and market transparency tools to blunt greenwashing should contribute to climate action not being derailed by doubt, distraction, or deceit.

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