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Disinformation and public engagement in the green transition



Disinformation and public engagement in the green transition

Final Report

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Table of contents

Summary	4
Introduction	6
Background and study objectives	6
Description of methodology	7
1. Part 1: Understanding the climate disinformation landscape	9
1.1 Types and sources of misinformation	9
1.2 Digital disinformation ecosystem	13
1.3 Public perception and behavioural responses	19
1.4 Barriers to effective institutional communication.....	23
1.5 Global disinformation campaigns and climate/biodiversity negotiations.....	26
2. Part 2: European Green Deal (EGD) case	28
2.1 Disinformation targeting the EGD	28
2.2 Stakeholder engagement and targeted communication.....	31
2.3 Institutional communication shortcomings.....	34
2.4 Narratives and legislative lessons	36
3. Part 3: Local and regional authorities (LRAs) as frontline actors	46
3.1 Role of LRAs	46
3.2 Tools and best practices for public engagement	51
4. Part 4: A forward-looking approach.....	59
4.1 Clean Industrial Deal versus European Green Deal.....	60
4.2 Developing a strategic narrative in a challenging geopolitical context	62
4.3 Monitoring policy rollbacks and simplification exercises	67
4.4 EU instruments and initiatives supporting citizen transitions.....	70
4.5 Capacity-building and EU networks	74
5. Part 5: Conclusions and policy recommendations	78
5.1 Recommendations for LRAs.....	78
5.2 Recommendations for EU and national policymakers.....	80
5.3 Recommendations for other stakeholder groups.....	81
List of references	83

List of tables

Table 1. EU instruments to address digital disinformation.....	17
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List of figures and boxes

Figure 1. From niche communities to mainstream debate: how disinformation spreads and gains influence.....	14
Figure 2. Digital platforms have changed how citizens encounter news and how fast misleading content spreads.....	15
Figure 3. How online amplification turns local issues into wider disinformation narratives	16
Figure 4. Digital disinformation ecosystem in a nutshell	19
Figure 5. Citizens' views on climate change and expectations from all levels of governance.....	20
Figure 6. Recognising disinformation: uneven confidence and limited verification.....	21
Figure 7. How citizens see climate action.....	23
Figure 8. The Social Climate Fund in a nutshell.....	72
Box 1. EU Nature Restoration Law (NRL) case study	36
Box 2. EU Sustainable Use of Pesticides case study	40
Box 3. CO ₂ emission standards for cars and vans case study	43
Box 4. The Rural Pact as an example of multi-level partnership	51
Box 5. Best practices implemented by LRAs to counter disinformation	52
Box 6. Best practices implemented by LRAs to build trust with citizens and communities	54
Box 7. Best practices implemented by LRAs to communicate effectively	57

List of abbreviations

AI	Artificial intelligence
ASAJA	Asociación Agraria Jóvenes Agricultores
BEUC	Bureau Européen des Unions de Consommateurs/European Consumer Organisation
CAN Europe	Climate Action Network Europe
CAP	<i>Confederação dos Agricultores de Portugal</i>
CBAM	Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism
CEMR	Council of European Municipalities and Regions
CID	Clean Industrial Deal
CIVEX	Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs
CoR	European Committee of the Regions
COP30	30th United Nations Climate Change Conference
CO ₂	Carbon dioxide
CSRD	Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive
CSDDD	Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive
DG CLIMA	(European Commission) Directorate-General for Climate Action
DG COMM	(European Commission) Directorate-General for Communication
DSA	Digital Services Act
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
EDMO	European Digital Media Observatory
EEAS	European External Action Service
EEB	European Environmental Bureau
EFCSN	European Fact-Checking Standards Network
EGD	European Green Deal
EIB	European Investment Bank
EU	European Union
FEDARENE	European Federation of Agencies and Regions for Energy and the Environment
FIMI	Foreign information manipulation and interference
GCoM	Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IPIE	International Panel on the Information Environment
ISD	Institute for Strategic Dialogue
JRC	Joint Research Centre
LRA	Local and regional authority
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NRL	Nature Restoration Law

OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RAS	Rapid alert system
SCF	Social Climate Fund
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprise
SUR	Sustainable Use Regulation
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Summary

The transition to a climate-neutral Europe depends on regulatory ambition, together with public trust, inclusive participation, and evidence-based communication. This study examines how climate- and environment-related misinformation and disinformation affect public engagement in the green transition, using the European Green Deal as a central case and focusing on the role of local and regional authorities as frontline actors.

The study finds that climate disinformation has evolved beyond outright climate denial. It increasingly appears as delay, solution scepticism, greenwashing, conspiratorial narratives, polarisation, doomism, and selective use of evidence. These narratives spread through a digital ecosystem shaped by algorithmic amplification, micro-targeting, automation, cross-platform recirculation and emotionally charged content. As a result, misleading claims can reach citizens faster and more widely than institutional or scientific rebuttals. At the same time, the study stresses that criticism is not necessarily disinformation. Concerns about costs, feasibility, timing, competitiveness, food security, administrative burden, territorial impacts, and access to alternatives may be legitimate where raised in good faith. The challenge is to distinguish clearly between false or misleading claims and democratic policy criticism, while recognising that disinformation often exploits genuine concerns.

The European Green Deal illustrates this dynamic. Its broad scope, covering energy, industry, agriculture, mobility, land use and consumer choices, made it vulnerable to narratives portraying climate and environmental action as economically harmful, socially unfair, imposed from above, and detached from local realities. The case studies on the Nature Restoration Law, the Sustainable Use of Pesticides initiative, and carbon dioxide emission standards for cars and vans show how complex policy files can be reduced to simplified claims about food security, rural livelihoods, costs, jobs, mobility, and freedom of choice. Misleading narratives proved more effective where communication came late, implementation pathways were unclear, affected sectors felt insufficiently recognised, or policy changes appeared inconsistent. This underlines that communication shortcomings and legislative design choices can unintentionally create information gaps.

Local and regional authorities are essential to closing those gaps, as the bodies closest to citizens' everyday experiences of climate impacts, energy costs, transport, housing, local services, and employment change. Their proximity enables them to detect emerging concerns, translate European Union and national objectives into locally meaningful language, convene trusted intermediaries, and

create spaces for dialogue. The study identifies practical approaches such as pre-bunking, accessible communication, partnerships with fact-checkers, schools, civil society, local media and experts, media literacy initiatives, participatory democracy tools, and support for trusted local information ecosystems. The best practices analysed show that trust is built by both providing accurate information and by making climate action practical, participatory, transparent and visibly responsive.

Looking ahead, the green transition must be communicated as a climate, economic-security and geopolitical resilience strategy. Policy simplification, postponements and reformulations must be communicated transparently, explaining the specific changes, elements that remain in place, and how long-term objectives will still be met. The study concludes that countering climate disinformation cannot rely on rebuttal alone. It requires timely communication, trusted messengers, meaningful participation, legal certainty, practical support, and responsible engagement by all actors. Public engagement is not an accessory to the green transition, but, rather, a core condition for its credibility, democratic legitimacy, and successful implementation.

Introduction

Background and study objectives

The transition to a climate-neutral Europe will succeed only if it is rooted in **public trust, inclusive participation, and evidence-based communication**. However, fake news and conspiracy theories about environmental and energy policies proliferate across Europe, distorting public discourse¹. These false narratives undermine trust in science, weaken public support for climate action, hinder policy implementation, and even erode democracy itself. The European Green Deal (EGD) became a particular lightning rod for misleading claims in the run-up to the 2024 European Parliament elections, as disinformation and misinformation campaigns spun European Union (EU) climate proposals into a non-factual and polarised debate².

Crafting a compelling, citizen-centred climate narrative alongside transparent, science-based policy-making is vital to counter false information and foster public engagement. Local and regional authorities (LRAs) are on the front lines of this challenge. Cities and regions are where the impacts of climate change are most directly felt and where European green policies must be implemented in practice. They also serve as the interface between citizens and higher levels of government, with misleading narratives often hitting the grassroots level first. The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) has a pivotal role to play in strengthening public engagement and resilience against climate disinformation at the subnational level. Through initiatives such as the European [Climate](#) Pact, the [Green Deal Going Local](#) campaign and long-standing networks such as the EU [Covenant of Mayors](#), the CoR helps to connect EU climate objectives with citizens' everyday realities. By fostering climate literacy and empowering local leaders, the CoR and its partners seek to ensure that climate narratives are shaped *with* citizens rather than imposed *on* them.

This study explores the nexus between disinformation (and misinformation) and public engagement in Europe's green transition, across local, regional and national levels. Using the EGD as a central case, it analyses how key policies became the targets of misleading narratives, the communication missteps that amplified them, and the ensuing lessons. It maps dominant narratives, the actors and channels spreading them (including platforms and bots), and identifies the

¹ Hodgson, R., 'EU governments discuss action on disinformation over climate policy', *Euronews*, 29 April 2025, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2025/04/29/eu-governments-discuss-action-on-disinformation-over-climate-policy>.

² European Parliament News, 'European elections: EU institutions prepared to counter disinformation', Press release, 5 June 2024, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20240603IPR21804/european-elections-eu-institutions-prepared-to-counter-disinformation>.

population segments and territories most susceptible, examining factors such as education, economic anxiety and political alienation. In parallel, it investigates effective climate communication, showcasing cases and best practices for successful local and regional initiatives and the tools and strategies that foster citizen support. The outcome is a **strategic, structured and inclusive roadmap for LRAs**, with concrete recommendations to boost climate literacy, reinforce grassroots trust, share lessons across borders and, ultimately, strengthen democratic resilience so that cities and regions can resist disinformation and drive a just, bottom-up, enduring green transition.

Description of methodology

This study is grounded in a robust analytical framework designed to produce a coherent, practical and policy-relevant assessment of disinformation and public engagement in the green transition. It combines systematic desk research, critical analysis, targeted stakeholder interviews and structured drafting to ensure that it is conceptually sound and responsive to the operational realities faced by LRAs.

Desk research is the principal evidence base of the study. It draws on an in-depth review of a broad range of source categories, selected to capture legal, policy, analytical, and practical dimensions. These categories include: academic and peer-reviewed research; EU policy and institutional materials; and grey literature and monitoring outputs, including observatory material, campaign analysis and survey-based evidence. In addition, practitioner toolkits and communication guidance were reviewed to identify operational approaches.

The study incorporates **stakeholder consultation** as a targeted methodological component to ensure that its findings reflect documented narratives and policy developments, alongside operational experience, implementation challenges, and practitioner perspectives. The process was designed to capture a balanced range of perspectives, including local authority practice, civil society, consumers, agriculture, rural actors, and sectoral industry. This was particularly important in testing the study's distinction between disinformation, misinformation and legitimate policy criticism, and ensuring that the final recommendations were grounded in operational realities rather than literature and policy documents. The stakeholder consultation component complements the analysis, case studies and best practices. The text refers to findings based on stakeholder feedback in line with the Chatham House Rule (i.e. without disclosing the identity or affiliation of stakeholders).

The study gives particular weight to the use of **case studies**. These provide a focused examination of concrete disinformation episodes or campaigns linked to major green policy files, allowing the study to move beyond abstract discussion

and assess how misleading narratives emerge, travel, and interact with policy debates in practice. Selected case studies concern the Nature Restoration Law (NRL), the Sustainable Use of Pesticides (SUP) framework, and carbon dioxide (CO₂) emission standards for cars and vans. Each relates to a high-profile EGD initiative that has attracted significant controversy and misinformation efforts, while together they span a diverse set of policy areas, including biodiversity, agriculture, climate targets, and transport.

This study adopts a **differentiated analytical approach** to avoid conflating disinformation, misinformation, and legitimate policy criticism. For the purposes of the study, disinformation refers to false or misleading information disseminated intentionally or strategically to deceive, manipulate or distort public debate, whereas misinformation refers to false or misleading information shared without necessarily implying such intent. By contrast, legitimate concerns or criticism include arguments raised in good faith by stakeholders, sectors or citizens regarding feasibility, costs, timing, competitiveness, food security, territorial impacts, administrative burden, access to alternatives or distributional effects. Such positions may reflect sectoral interests and may themselves be contested, but should not be treated as misinformation or disinformation merely because they oppose or question a policy measure. This distinction is applied throughout the study and the case studies, enabling analysis of how disinformation interacts with genuine policy concerns, institutional communication choices and legislative design, rather than assuming that resistance to green policy proposals is, in itself, evidence of disinformation.

Finally, the study's practical relevance is anchored in the identification of **best practices for public engagement** by LRAs in countering climate and environmental disinformation. It identifies and assesses best practices according to their capacity to strengthen credibility, transparency and confidence in public institutions, to translate technically complex policy measures into accessible and locally relevant messages, and to enhance resilience to misleading narratives through active local or regional action. It thus focuses on practices that are relevant to the operational needs of LRAs and capable of generating transferable lessons across contexts, rather than simply highlighting isolated successes.

1. Part 1: Understanding the climate disinformation landscape

This section sets out the analytical framework for understanding climate- and environment-related misinformation and disinformation and their implications for public engagement. It first maps the typology of false or misleading content, distinguishing deliberate campaigns from unintentional miscommunication, and identifies principal sources, including lobbying efforts, political movements and coordinated digital operations. It then examines the contemporary digital ecosystem through which such content circulates: the role of online platforms and social networks, the mechanics of amplification, and the contribution of automated accounts and coordinated behaviour. To support clear communication of these dynamics, the section includes an infographic depicting disinformation flows and amplification mechanisms.

The analysis then turns to audiences. It explores public attitudes towards climate and environmental policies, including perceived trade-offs with economic development, and assesses behavioural responses and their susceptibility to dominant disinformation narratives. The section identifies institutional barriers that hamper effective public communication, such as overly technical language, inconsistent messaging, limited transparency, and weak engagement with local actors, and frames these as practical constraints that can be addressed by the study's recommendations. Finally, it examines international and domestic campaigns influencing public perceptions of climate and environmental policies.

1.1 Types and sources of misinformation

Transition to a climate-neutral Europe depends on both support for climate action and trust in the institutions responsible for designing, explaining and implementing that action. Climate and environment-related disinformation risks undermining confidence in specific climate policies and in EU institutions, public authorities and democratic processes more broadly. This challenge is increasingly significant: misleading narratives on climate and energy are shaping public debate across Europe at a time of **rising polarisation, public fatigue, and weakening social consensus on the transition**. EU citizens' views already reflect this vulnerability, with growing public distrust towards democratic institutions and processes identified as one of the most serious challenges to democracy (49%), alongside foreign information manipulation, interference and disinformation (42%), and the lack of transparency in respect of whether political content online is promoted through new technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) (32%)³.

³ European Commission, *Special Eurobarometer 568 – Protecting and promoting democracy*, Eurobarometer Report May 2025, November 2025, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3383>.

At local government level, the spread of misleading content is particularly challenging because many aspects of climate policy, such as energy planning, waste management, and mobility changes, are implemented locally. Crucially, local authorities are often among the most trusted public institutions, giving them a unique opportunity to detect and counter disinformation early, provided they are equipped to do so⁴.

Climate misleading content can be classified into three types based on intent and harm⁵. **Misinformation** refers to false or inaccurate information shared without harmful intent, often by someone who believes it to be true. It usually arises from misunderstandings, misinterpretations of data or simply outdated knowledge⁶. **Disinformation** is intentionally false or misleading, disseminated with the intent to deceive, manipulate or cause harm. Climate disinformation is often coordinated, financially supported, and tailored to specific audiences to weaken support for climate action⁷. Disinformation tactics can include selective use of data, promotion of pseudo-scientific claims, and amplification of conspiracy narratives. Unlike misinformation, which can be addressed through education, clarification, and improved communication, disinformation is generally more difficult to counter, as it requires more targeted efforts to identify, expose, and respond to such deliberate distortions⁸. **Malinformation** involves sharing true information in a misleading way, such as using selective data or misinterpreting scientific reports to create confusion.

⁴ Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), *Local Truth, Shared Trust: Tackling mis/disinformation from the local level*, 6 October 2025, <https://ccre-cemr.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Local-truth-shared-trust-EN.pdf>; European Commission, ‘Action Plan against Disinformation’, 5 December 2018, https://commission.europa.eu/publications/action-plan-disinformation-commission-contribution-european-council-13-14-december-2018_en; Gértrudix, M. et al., ‘Disinformation as an obstructionist strategy in climate change mitigation: a review of the scientific literature for a systemic understanding of the phenomenon’, *Open Research Europe*, Vol. 4, p. 169, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11467642/>. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Climate Promise, ‘What are climate misinformation and disinformation and how can we tackle them?’, 1 May 2025, <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/what-are-climate-misinformation-and-disinformation-and-how-can-we-tackle-them>; Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy (GCoM), *Addressing Rampant Climate Disinformation*, 29 October 2024, <https://www.globalcovenantofmayors.org/press/addressing-rampant-climate-disinformation/>.

⁵ Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), *Local Truth, Shared Trust: Tackling mis/disinformation from the local level*, 6 October 2025, <https://ccre-cemr.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Local-truth-shared-trust-EN.pdf>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Forum on Information and Democracy, *Workstream on Information Integrity on Climate Change and Other Environmental Issues*, 6 November 2025, <https://informationdemocracy.org/2025/11/05/ahead-of-cop30-the-forum-on-information-and-democracy-presents-structural-solutions-to-combat-climate-disinformation/>.

⁸ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Climate Promise, ‘What are climate misinformation and disinformation and how can we tackle them?’, 1 May 2025, <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/what-are-climate-misinformation-and-disinformation-and-how-can-we-tackle-them>; Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy (GCoM), *Addressing Rampant Climate Disinformation*, 29 October 2024, <https://www.globalcovenantofmayors.org/press/addressing-rampant-climate-disinformation/>.

Climate misleading content encompasses a spectrum of false or misleading narratives, ranging from outright denial of climate change to subtler distortions. Key types include:

- **Climate denial:** Spreading claims that climate change is not happening or is not human caused. Even ‘soft’ or strategic denial, i.e. acknowledging climate change but downplaying its urgency, undermines policy momentum⁹.
- **Climate delay:** Arguing that proposed solutions (e.g. renewable energy, emissions cuts) are too costly, risky or unfair. These claims cast doubt on the need for or feasibility of action, often by highlighting economic fears (e.g. alleged job losses) or exaggerating uncertainties. As ‘delay’ narratives are more plausible than outright denial, they are especially effective at slowing public support for climate policy¹⁰.
- **Greenwashing:** False or exaggerated claims by companies/institutions about their environmental benefits. For instance, firms may use ‘eco-friendly’ imagery or buzzwords to imply sustainability without real changes. Greenwashing creates a false impression of progress and delays regulatory action by masking the need for stronger measures.
- **Conspiracy narratives:** Claims that climate science or policy is a hoax or part of a secret plot. Examples include saying climate change is a pretext for government control, or that renewable energy plans are intended to manipulate economies. These stories aim to delegitimise science and sow distrust in institutions¹¹.
- **Solution scepticism campaigns:** Casting doubt on specific climate measures by arguing that they are too expensive, impractical, or won’t work. These narratives often focus on alleged trade-offs (e.g. ‘it will destroy jobs’) to weaken support for concrete policies. While sometimes presented as ‘reasonable scrutiny’, misleading content uses such narratives to stall or dilute action rather than improve solutions¹².
- **Polarisation framing:** Recasting climate action as part of a wider culture

⁹ Gértrudix, M. et al., ‘Disinformation as an obstructionist strategy in climate change mitigation: a review of the scientific literature for a systemic understanding of the phenomenon’, *Open Research Europe*, Vol. 4, p. 169, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11467642/>.

¹⁰ Lamb, W.F. et al., ‘Discourses of climate delay’, *Global Sustainability*, Vol. 3, Issue 17, 2020, pp. 1–5. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/global-sustainability/article/discourses-of-climate-delay/7B11B722E3E3454BB6212378E32985A7>. This paper identifies 12 common discourses that can be recognised and countered.

¹¹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Climate Promise, ‘What are climate misinformation and disinformation and how can we tackle them?’, 1 May 2025, <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/what-are-climate-misinformation-and-disinformation-and-how-can-we-tackle-them>; Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy (GCoM), *Addressing Rampant Climate Disinformation*, 29 October 2024, <https://www.globalcovenantofmayors.org/press/addressing-rampant-climate-disinformation/>.

¹² Gértrudix, M. et al., ‘Disinformation as an obstructionist strategy in climate change mitigation: a review of the scientific literature for a systemic understanding of the phenomenon’, *Open Research Europe*, Vol. 4, p. 169, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11467642/>.

war or ideological battle. This shifts attention away from evidence and policy design toward identity, resentment or group loyalty, making climate policy support feel like a partisan ‘side-taking’ issue rather than a public interest decision¹³.

- **Doomism (climate fatalism):** Promoting the idea that is already too late to prevent serious harm, so action is pointless. Doomist narratives can sound like concern but often lead to disengagement, apathy or nihilism. It discourages action even when solutions can still reduce impact and risks¹⁴.

These narratives are constructed using various rhetorical and technical techniques. Common strategies include **cherry-picking data** to mislead audiences, creating **manufactured uncertainty** by portraying settled science as still debatable, and **delegitimising** policies by framing them as undemocratic or captured by special interests. Other techniques include offering superficial alternatives to real solutions and using **amplification tactics** to spread narratives through coordinated posting and cross-platform repetition¹⁵. In the EU context, a further distinction is made between general disinformation and **foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI)**, which refers to intentional, coordinated, and often non-illegal behaviours by foreign actors (state or non-state) to distort public perception, erode trust in democracy, and polarise societies. Tactics include spreading disinformation, using fake accounts, hacking, and exploiting content generated by AI¹⁶.

Climate disinformation may overlap with broader anti-EU narratives where EU green policies are presented as ineffective or costly, but also as evidence of ‘Brussels’ overreach, loss of national sovereignty, elite-driven policy-making, or disregard for ordinary citizens and local communities¹⁷. These policies are used to portray the EU as remote, coercive or detached from democratic accountability, rather than as a framework for collective climate action¹⁸.

Stakeholders emphasise the need to distinguish disinformation from legitimate policy criticism. Good-faith concerns about feasibility, transition timelines,

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy (GCoM), ‘Addressing rampant climate disinformation’, 29 October 2024, <https://www.globalcovenantofmayors.org/press/addressing-rampant-climate-disinformation/>.

¹⁵ International Panel on the Information Environment (IPIE), ‘Information integrity about climate science – a systematic review’, Synthesis report SR2025.1, 2025; Gérudix, M. et al., ‘Disinformation as an obstructionist strategy in climate change mitigation: a review of the scientific literature for a systemic understanding of the phenomenon’, *Open Research Europe*, Vol. 4, p. 169, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11467642/>.

¹⁶ European Commission, ‘Strategic communication and countering foreign information manipulation and interference’, n.d., https://commission.europa.eu/topics/countering-information-manipulation_en.

¹⁷ European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO), *Disinformation about farmer’s protests keeps growing in February, fueling anti-EU sentiment*, 15 March 2024, <https://edmo.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/EDMO-33-Horizontal.pdf>.

¹⁸ EUvsDiSiNFO, *Weaponising climate change to undermine the West*, 30 October 2025, <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/weaponising-climate-change-to-undermine-the-west/>.

alternatives, distributional impacts, competitiveness, or food security should not be treated as disinformation merely because they challenge specific climate or environmental measures. Such criticism is part of democratic debate where it remains evidence-based, proportionate, and oriented towards workable policy solutions. It becomes problematic where it is detached from evidence, framed as an absolute trade-off, or used to imply that climate and environmental action is inherently impossible, unaffordable, or socially harmful¹⁹.

Misleading climate-related information originates from a range of actors, forming a **complex and overlapping information ecosystem**. Climate disinformation in Europe is rarely generated by a single source, but, rather, emerges from an ecosystem in which domestic political actors, fringe media, entrepreneurs and, at times, mainstream outlets act as key producers and amplifiers, while foreign state-linked operations may inject and intensify narratives that are then adapted and recirculated by local intermediaries²⁰. Its effectiveness lies in the circulation of falsehoods, together with strategies of amplification, mainstreaming and narrative laundering through politicians, media, think tanks, associations, public relations (PR) infrastructures and, in some cases, lobbying or adjacent influence practices that help to embed misleading climate claims in ordinary policy debate²¹.

Stakeholder evidence suggests that climate-related misperceptions are often experienced locally as **diffuse narratives** circulating without a clear original source, rather than as clearly identifiable campaigns. Citizens may repeat simplified or distorted interpretations of EU climate policy that have gradually become part of everyday public discourse. This is particularly challenging where policy packages are renamed, revised, or politically reframed over time, making it harder for local communicators to explain clearly what has changed, what remains stable, and what the policy actually requires²².

1.2 Digital disinformation ecosystem

The digital disinformation ecosystem is the network of online platforms, media actors, institutions, technologies and users through which information is produced, circulated, amplified and contested. At the core of the spread of misleading climate content, it often leverages emotions, identity, and engagement rather than accuracy. This system enables disinformation to move rapidly from niche communities to the mainstream through various amplification mechanisms.

¹⁹ Written responses to stakeholder questionnaires: agriculture and rural affairs stakeholder, April 2026; stakeholder active in agriculture-related policy, May 2026; civil society stakeholder, May 2026.

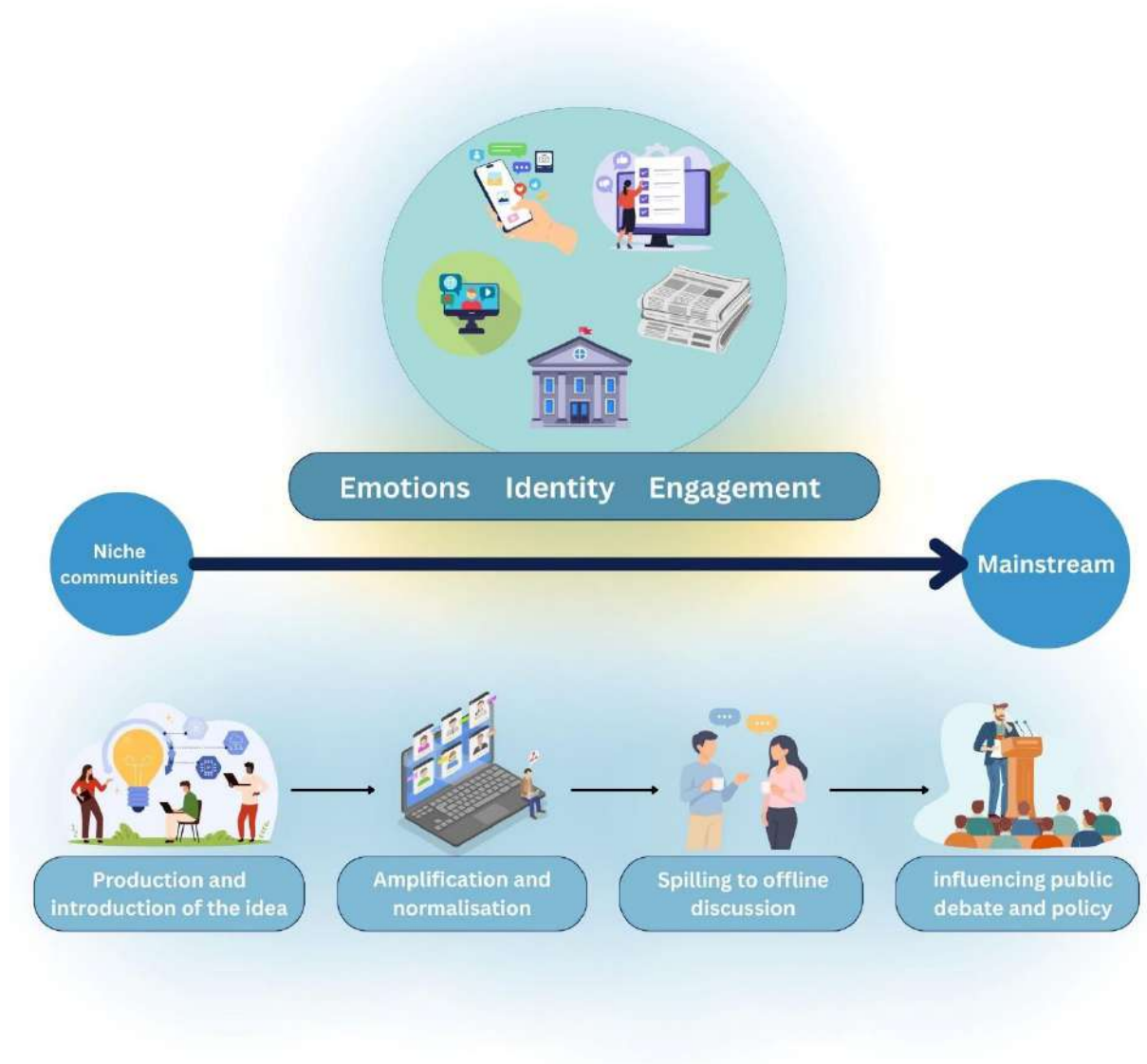
²⁰ European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO), *Literature review on actors of disinformation in the European Union*, 2024, pp. 3–12, <https://edmo.eu/publications/literature-review-on-actors-of-disinformation-in-the-european-union/>.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Stakeholder interview with climate and environmental policy stakeholder, April 2026.

It operates in multiple stages: from production and introduction of the idea to amplification and normalisation, ultimately spilling over into offline discussions and influencing public debate and policy.

Figure 1. From niche communities to mainstream debate: how disinformation spreads and gains influence



Source: Authors' elaboration.

Digital platforms are now a defining feature of the information ecosystem. Traditional media such as public and private television and radio, the written press, and their digital services, remain important and generally enjoy higher levels of public trust. However, citizens increasingly encounter and interpret news through social media, video and streaming platforms, blogs, and online news portals²³. The European Parliament's 2025 Eurobarometer Social Media Survey

²³ UNESCO, 'Global Initiative for Information Integrity on Climate Change' <https://www.unesco.org/en/information-integrity-climate-change>

indicates that 59% of respondents use digital sources daily to follow social and political current affairs²⁴. This shift matters because digital platforms amplify the speed, reach, and emotional intensity with which information circulates. Their engagement-driven design and algorithmic personalisation can reinforce users' existing views, creating echo chambers in which misleading narratives spread rapidly and with limited contextual scrutiny. As a result, false or manipulative content, particularly when presented through emotionally charged formats such as memes or sensational stories, can travel significantly faster than verified information, increasing citizens' exposure to misinformation and shaping public debate in ways that are difficult for traditional safeguards to contain.

Figure 2. Digital platforms have changed how citizens encounter news and how fast misleading content spreads



Source: Authors' elaboration.

Several reinforcing mechanisms drive this dynamic. **Algorithmic recommendation systems** tend to privilege content that provokes strong emotional reactions, including misleading or polarising material²⁵. **Micro-targeting** can intensify this effect by delivering tailored disinformation to specific

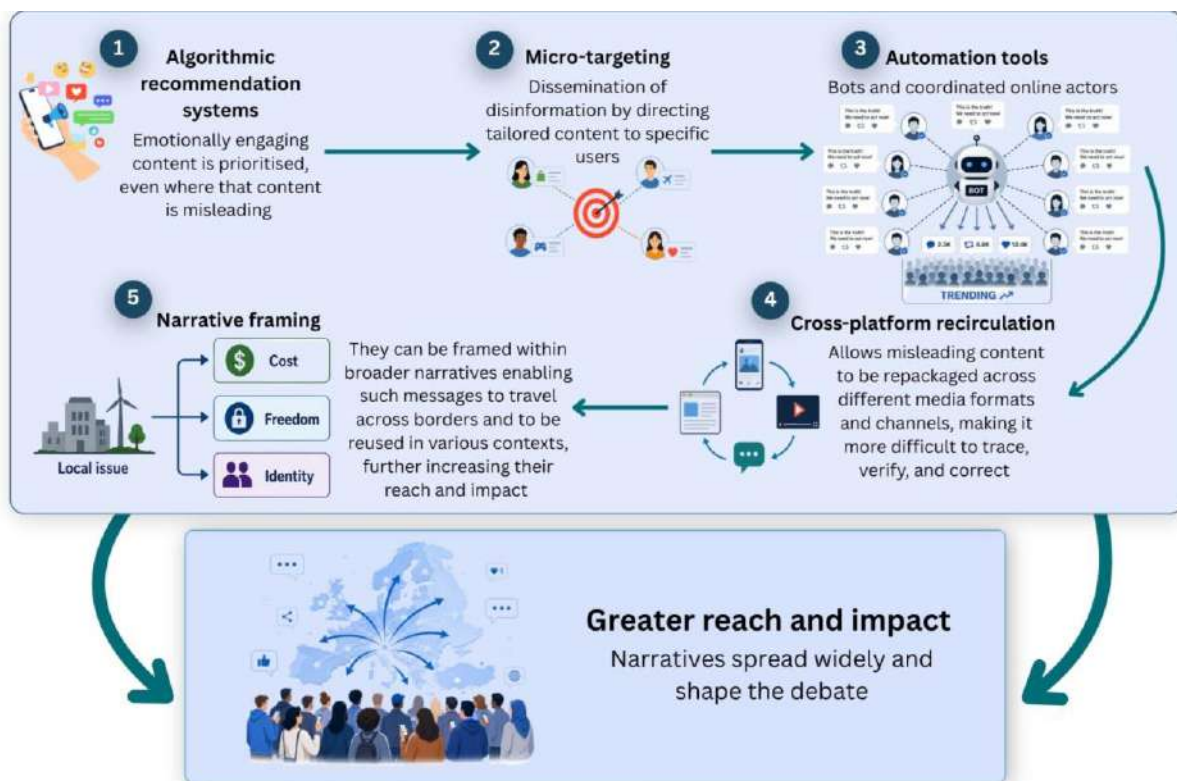
²⁴ European Parliament, *Flash Eurobarometer -Media & News Survey 2023*, November 2023, available at https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3153?utm_source=

²⁴ UNDP Climate Promise, 'What are climate misinformation and disinformation and how can we tackle them?' (1 May 2025) <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/what-are-climate-misinformation-and-disinformation-and-how-can-we-tackle-them>; see also Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy, *Addressing Rampant Climate Disinformation*, 29 October 2024, <https://www.globalcovenantofmayors.org/press/addressing-rampant-climate-disinformation/>

²⁵ International Panel on the Information Environment (IPIE), 'Information integrity about climate science – a systematic review', Synthesis report SR2025.1, 2025, https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/643ecb10be528d2c1da863cb/68541b1613026bbfd94181b9_SR2025.1%20-%20Information%20Integrity%20about%20Climate%20Science.pdf.

groups, sometimes using personal data obtained or processed improperly²⁶. **Automation tools** such as bots and coordinated networks of accounts can then amplify these messages at scale, creating a false impression of credibility, popularity, or public consensus²⁷. Misleading content is also often recirculated across platforms and formats through so-called **content laundering**, making its origins harder to trace and its claims harder to verify or correct²⁸. Finally, local issues can be reframed through broader and highly resonant narratives centred on cost, freedom, identity, or cultural threat, allowing the same messages to travel across borders, adapt to different contexts, and maximise their political and social impact²⁹.

Figure 3. How online amplification turns local issues into wider disinformation narratives



Source: Authors' elaboration.

Stakeholder experience highlights a clear asymmetry between evidence-based communication and platform-driven amplification. Scientific and institutional

²⁶ European Commission, 'Action Plan against Disinformation', 5 December 2018, https://commission.europa.eu/publications/action-plan-disinformation-commission-contribution-european-council-13-14-december-2018_en.

²⁷ Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), 'Coordinated Inauthentic Behaviour', 2 April 2026, <https://www.isdglobal.org/our-expertise/information-warfare-and-online-manipulation/coordinated-inauthentic-behaviour/>.

²⁸ European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), *Exposing Fake News Pipelines*, January 2026, <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/news-media/eesc-info/eesc-info-january-2026/articles/134353>.

²⁹ Harmful Environmental Agendas & Tactics (HEAT), *Post-Project Reflection Report*, June 2025, <https://www.disinfo.eu/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/HEAT-follow-up-report-web.pdf>.

rebuttals may be persuasive in expert, policy, or traditional media settings, but often fail to reach wider audiences unless adapted to the formats, language, and cultural codes of high-impact platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube³⁰.

A recent sector-specific example illustrates how these mechanisms operate in renewable energy debates. A WindEurope mapping of online anti-wind activity across six social media platforms from May 2024 to February 2026 identified 573 accounts and 42,947 anti-wind posts, with 68% classified as disinformation- or misinformation-related. The most recurrent narratives framed wind energy as environmentally destructive, technically unviable, economically irrational, or imposed by hidden or anti-democratic interests. This illustrates how misleading climate and energy narratives can circulate across platforms, actors and countries. They then enter wider public debate and create tangible implementation risks, including local political pressure, formal objections or appeals, and delays to renewable-energy projects³¹.

The EU has put in place several instruments to address digital disinformation (see Table 1).

Table 1. EU instruments to address digital disinformation

Instrument	Role/function
Action Plan against Disinformation ³²	Treats disinformation as a strategic challenge; emphasises the role of social media/online platforms in its spread
Rapid alert system (RAS) ³³	Supports exchanges between EU institutions and Member States on emerging disinformation threats
European Democracy Action Plan ³⁴	Strengthens democratic resilience by addressing vulnerabilities in citizen/institutional systems
Strengthened Code of Practice on Disinformation ³⁵ (Digital Services Act (DSA) Code of Conduct)	Originally voluntary; integrated into the DSA framework; benchmark for assessing platform compliance with DSA risk mitigation obligations

³⁰ Written response to stakeholder questionnaire: civil society stakeholder, May 2026.

³¹ WindEurope and CASM Technology, ‘Wind Energy Dis- and Misinformation’, 21 April 2026, <https://windeurope.org/data/products/wind-energy-dis-and-misinformation-undermining-europes-security-and-competitiveness/>.

³² European Commission, ‘Action Plan against Disinformation’, 5 December 2018, https://commission.europa.eu/publications/action-plan-disinformation-commission-contribution-european-council-13-14-december-2018_en.

³³ European External Action Service (EEAS), *Factsheet: Rapid Alert System*, March 2019, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ras_factsheet_march_2019_0.pdf.

³⁴ European Commission, European Democracy Action Plan, COM(2020) 790 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0790>.

³⁵ European Commission, *A strengthened EU Code of Practice on Disinformation*, n.d., https://commission.europa.eu/topics/countering-information-manipulation/strengthened-eu-code-practice-disinformation_en.

Instrument	Role/function
DSA Transparency Database ³⁶	Operational transparency tool under DSA; collects platforms' reasons for content moderation; allows for scrutiny of decisions, trend analysis, and monitoring of platform responses ³⁷
European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) ³⁸	Monitors climate disinformation; maintains a repository of fact-checked articles.
European Commission Directorate-General for Climate Action (DG CLIMA) 'Climate disinformation' page ³⁹	Signposts accessible science-based resources (e.g. Commission library guide, United Nations (UN) myth-busting materials)

For local and regional authorities, these frameworks provide tools for monitoring disinformation and awareness of the operational environment. However, their effectiveness relies on local access and the **ability to tailor insights** to specific community needs, which is crucial for effective communication and intervention at local, grassroots level⁴⁰.

³⁶ European Commission, 'DSA Transparency Database', n.d., <https://transparency.dsa.ec.europa.eu/>.

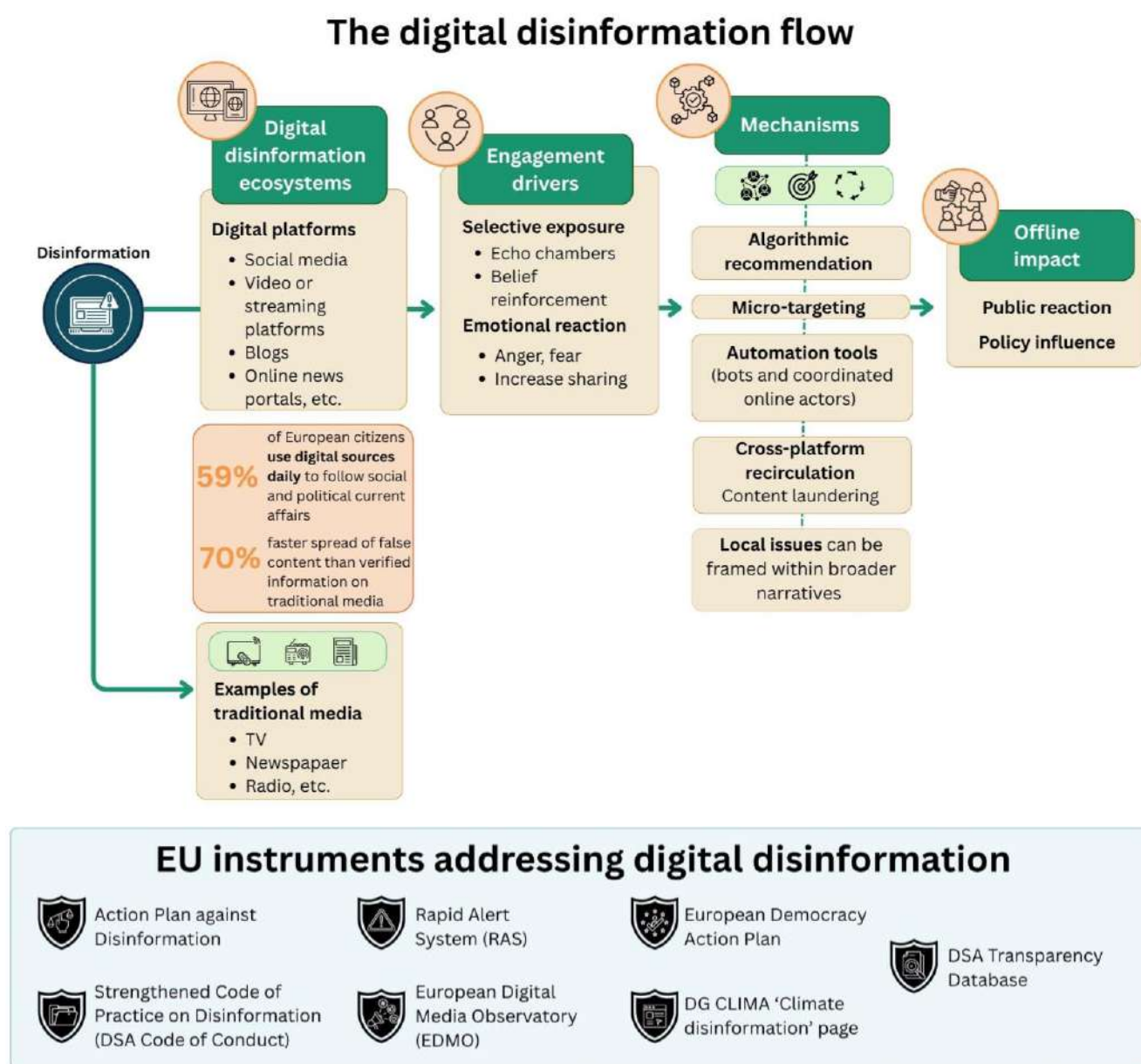
³⁷ Transparency and monitoring tool for platform moderation patterns.

³⁸ European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO), 'Climate', n.d., <https://edmo.eu/thematic-areas/climate/>.

³⁹ European Commission, *Climate disinformation*, n.d., https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/climate-disinformation_en.

⁴⁰ European Committee of the Regions (CoR), *Handbook on countering online disinformation at the local and regional level*, 2022, <https://case-research.eu/publications/handbook-on-countering-online-disinformation-at-the-local-and-regional-level/>.

Figure 4. Digital disinformation ecosystem in a nutshell



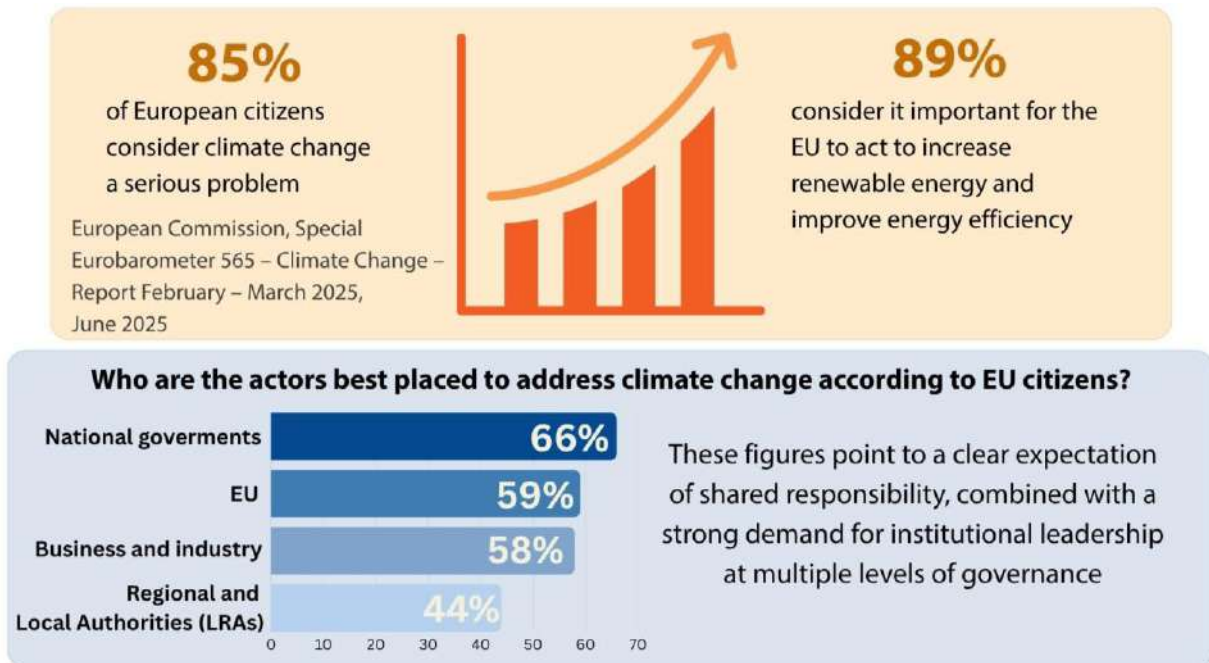
Source: Authors' elaboration.

1.3 Public perception and behavioural responses

Public attitudes in the EU towards climate change and climate action reflect growing concern about the climate situation, with strong expectations for action at various governance levels. According to Eurobarometer data, 85% of EU citizens consider climate change a serious problem. There is also broad support for public action: 88% consider it important for the EU to act to increase renewable energy and improve energy efficiency, while citizens identify national governments (66%), the EU (59%), business and industry (58%), and regional and local authorities (44%) as the actors best placed to address climate change. These

figures point to a clear expectation of **shared responsibility**, combined with a strong demand for **institutional leadership** at multiple levels of governance⁴¹.

Figure 5. Citizens' views on climate change and expectations from all levels of governance⁴²



Source: Authors' elaboration.

Surveys show that climate misinformation has penetrated deeply into public opinion worldwide. A 2022 multi-country poll found widespread belief in at least one false climate claim across all regions studied⁴³. In Europe, citizens report rising exposure to climate related 'fake news'. However, confidence in recognising disinformation remains uneven: 61% are confident they can identify it, only 12% are very confident, and 32% are not confident. Verification practices are also limited: 66% of respondents report encountering disinformation at least sometime in the previous week, but only 14% use a fact-checking tool or website when unsure, while 10% take no steps to verify the information⁴⁴.

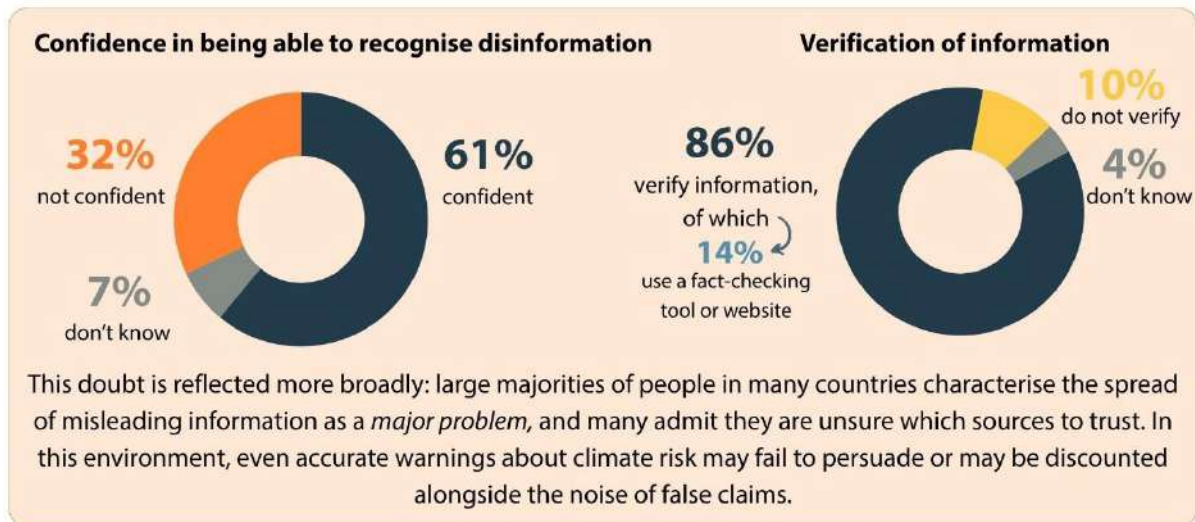
⁴¹ European Commission, *Special Eurobarometer 565 – Climate Change – Report February – March 2025*, June 2025, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3472>.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Climate Action Against Disinformation, 'The impacts of climate disinformation on public perception', 15 November 2022), <https://caad.info/analysis/reports/the-impacts-of-climate-disinformation-on-public-perception-2/>.

⁴⁴ European Parliament, *Eurobarometer – Social Media Survey 2025*, October 2025, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3592>.

Figure 6. Recognising disinformation: uneven confidence and limited verification⁴⁵



Source: Authors' elaboration.

Research suggests that people process scientific information and misinformation differently. How individuals respond to climate information is influenced by their perceived **trust in the source** and the **emotional weight of the message**. While scientific information may be processed based on its credibility and factuality, misinformation is often processed more superficially, driven by emotional reactions such as empathy or fear. This highlights the importance of engaging with the facts, alongside the values and lived experiences of the audience⁴⁶. Evidence shows that vulnerability to misinformation appears to cluster less by formal region than by settlement type and age.

Rural areas are an important risk environment, as trust in the EU remains lower in rural places⁴⁷. Demographically, younger people are more exposed to potentially misleading content because social media now dominates their information diet⁴⁸. Older age or lower education is associated with weaker climate understanding and lower support for climate action⁴⁹.

⁴⁵ European Parliament, *Eurobarometer – Social Media Survey 2025*, October 2025; Valdes, I., Kirzinger, A., Schumacher, S. and Hamel, L., 'KFF misinformation poll snapshot: public views misinformation as a major problem, feels uncertain about accuracy of information on current events', KFF, 15 December 2023.

⁴⁶ Gértrudix, M. et al., 'Disinformation as an obstructionist strategy in climate change mitigation: a review of the scientific literature for a systemic understanding of the phenomenon', *Open Research Europe*, Vol. 4, p. 169, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11467642/>.

⁴⁷ European Commission, *Special Eurobarometer 565: Climate change*, June 2025, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3472>.

⁴⁸ European Parliament Research Service (EPRS), *Youth and social media*, December 2025, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2025/779235/EPRS_BRI%282025%29779235_EN.pdf.

⁴⁹ European Commission, *Special Eurobarometer 565: Climate change*, June 2025, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3472>.

According to some stakeholders, susceptibility to misinformation is shaped by practical vulnerability and proximity to policy impacts. Groups facing energy poverty or lower digital literacy may be less able to verify misleading claims, while farmers, rural communities, and agri-food actors may be more directly exposed where narratives connect climate policy to input costs, livelihoods, regulatory complexity, or food prices⁵⁰.

Public support for climate action is partly shaped by how citizens perceive the **economic trade-offs of transition**, particularly given cost-of-living pressures and concerns about competitiveness. While climate policies are often debated in terms of short-term costs, survey evidence suggests that many citizens interpret climate action as economically rational and strategically beneficial⁵¹. However, those perceptions coexist with a persistent ‘everyday economy’ lens through which climate policies are evaluated. In the European Investment Bank (EIB) Climate Survey, EU respondents most frequently cite increased cost of living as one of the biggest challenges facing their country (55%), with climate change ranked among the top challenges by a smaller share (32%)⁵². This divergence helps to explain why narratives that emphasise affordability, distributional impacts, or alleged risks to jobs and competitiveness can gain traction. Conversely, when climate measures are communicated as investments with tangible returns, public receptiveness is stronger⁵³.

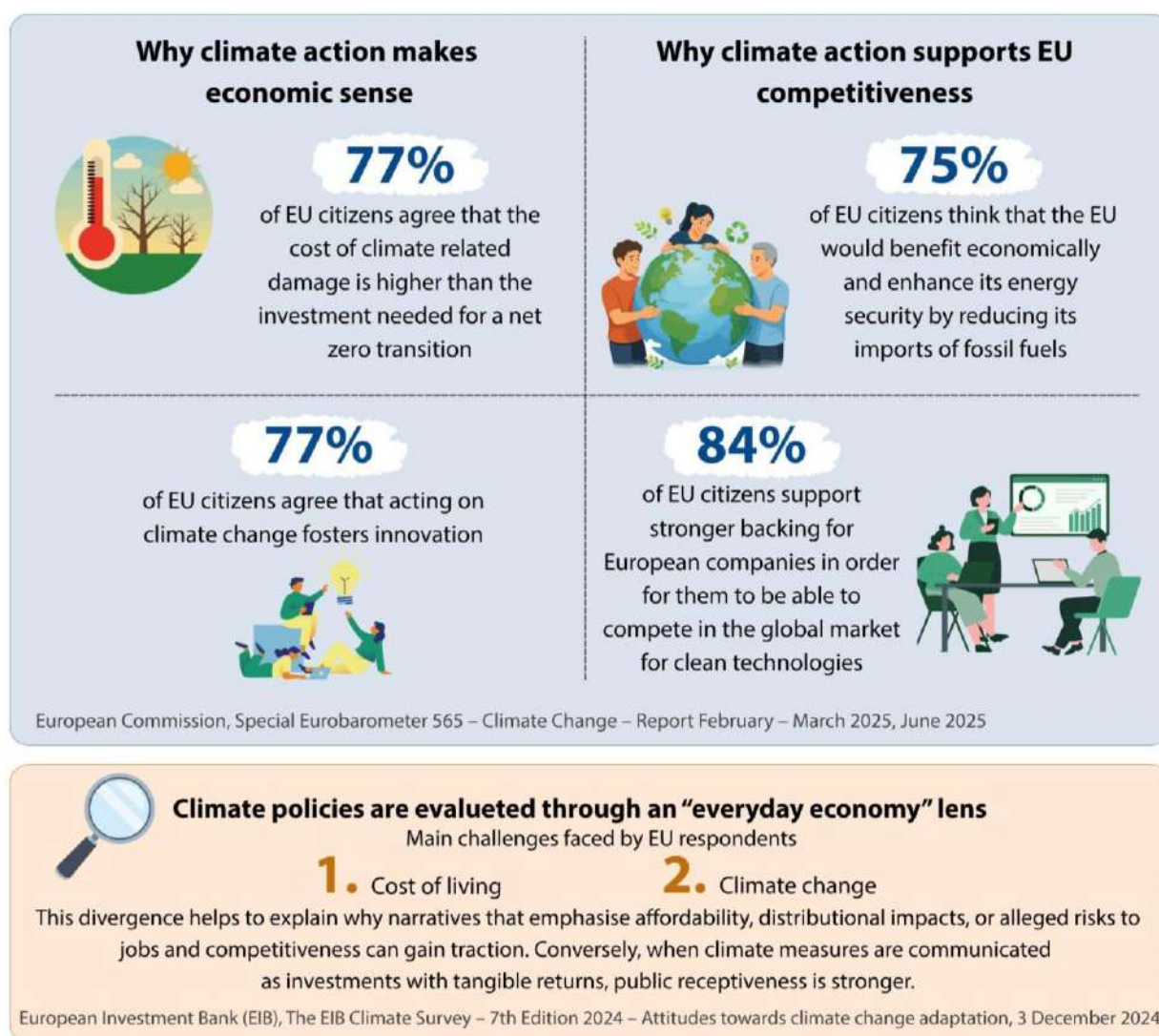
⁵⁰ Stakeholder interview: climate and environmental policy stakeholder, April 2026; written responses to stakeholder questionnaires: agriculture and rural affairs stakeholder, April 2026; stakeholder active in agriculture-related policy, May 2026; civil society stakeholder, May 2026.

⁵¹ European Commission, *Special Eurobarometer 565 – Climate Change – Report February – March 2025*, June 2025, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3472>.

⁵² European Investment Bank (EIB), *The EIB Climate Survey – 7th Edition 2024 – Attitudes towards climate change adaptation*, 3 December 2024, <https://www.eib.org/en/surveys/climate-survey/7th-climate-survey/eu-27>.

⁵³ More recent Standard Eurobarometer data confirm that cost-of-living concerns remain highly salient among EU citizens compared to climate change-related concerns. At national level, 36% of respondents identified rising prices, inflation and the cost of living as one of the two most important issues facing their country, compared to 7% who identified the environment and risks related to climate change. European Commission, *Standard Eurobarometer 105 – Spring 2026*, May 2026, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3613>.

Figure 7. How citizens see climate action



Source: Authors' elaboration.

Effective communication strategies should go beyond ‘debunking’ false claims and focus on **understanding what matters to people**, recognising their legitimate concerns, and tailoring messages accordingly. According to the ‘How to talk to people about climate action’ toolkit⁵⁴, productive conversations begin with understanding what individuals care about and addressing their concerns in a way that resonates with their values, rather than overwhelming them with scientific facts alone.

1.4 Barriers to effective institutional communication

Several barriers may limit the effectiveness of public communication on climate and environmental policies. These barriers often arise from overly technical

⁵⁴ European Climate Pact, *How to talk to people about climate action*, 16 November 2022, <https://climate-pact.europa.eu/system/files/2022-11/How%20to%20talk%20to%20people%20about%20climate%20action%20toolkit.pdf>.

language, inconsistent messaging, limited transparency, and insufficient engagement with local actors. Taken together, they should be understood as practical constraints on climate policy delivery, rather than solely communication style problems. They shape whether citizens can link abstract targets and regulations to concrete implications for household costs, local services, and livelihoods, and whether institutions can sustain the necessary dialogue that builds trust over time. Where these constraints persist, information gaps are more likely to be filled by informal interpretations or simplified narratives that travel faster than institutional explanations.

While some of these elements will be explained more thoroughly in Part II of this study, these challenges can be grouped into five key operational categories for analytical purposes:

- **Complexity:** Climate policies are often multi-layered, and rely on technical terminology, detailed procedures, and long implementation timelines, all of which can make them difficult to communicate clearly. Citizens generally seek straightforward explanations but may instead encounter oversimplified or misleading interpretations⁵⁵. For example, citizens might wish to understand how a given measure will affect household costs, mobility, or local economy; where institutions do not provide clear, accessible explanations supported by local examples, this gap may be filled by informal or inaccurate peer-to-peer interpretations.
- **Trust and messenger environment:** Citizens often distinguish between sources of information, which makes trust a central factor in how messages are received⁵⁶. Institutional communication must take account of fragmented trust environments, recognising that the same policy might be interpreted differently depending on the communicator. Where trust in institutions is uneven, citizens may place greater confidence in community leaders, local authorities or locally recognised experts than in central administrations or technical bodies. This makes it essential for public authorities to adapt both message and messenger to the intended audience.
- **Platform and data constraints:** Real-time transparency from platforms remains limited, making it difficult to track how misinformation spreads and assess the effectiveness of countermeasures⁵⁷. Although EU policy frameworks increasingly seek to strengthen platform responsibilities,

⁵⁵ Gértrudix, M. et al., ‘Disinformation as an obstructionist strategy in climate change mitigation: a review of the scientific literature for a systemic understanding of the phenomenon’, *Open Research Europe*, Vol. 4, p. 169, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11467642/>.

⁵⁶ European Commission, ‘Strategic communication and countering foreign information manipulation and interference’, n.d., https://commission.europa.eu/topics/countering-information-manipulation_en.

⁵⁷ International Panel on the Information Environment (IPIE), ‘Information integrity about climate science – a systematic review’, Synthesis report SR2025.1, 2025, https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/643ecb10be528d2c1da863cb/68541b1613026bbfd94181b9_SR2025.1%20-%20Information%20Integrity%20about%20Climate%20Science.pdf.

notably through codes of practice and risk mitigation obligations, public authorities may still face practical limitations in monitoring, access to relevant data, and evaluation capacity⁵⁸. Access to localised and actionable data remains particularly important if responses are to be timely, proportionate, and effective at local level.

- **Coordination across governance levels and the local engagement gap:** A recurring difficulty arises when EU or national policy communication is not sufficiently aligned with local realities⁵⁹. LRAs play a crucial role in translating abstract policy objectives into tangible and locally relevant impacts. If these authorities are not adequately supported, the proximity that should facilitate citizen engagement may instead leave local communication spaces more vulnerable to place-based misinformation and misunderstanding. Weak engagement with local actors can be especially consequential as it limits the number of credible, trusted intermediaries available to translate policy into meaningful terms and flag emerging distortions early. Where participation and consultation are perceived as distant, episodic, or limited, local authorities and community organisations may end up reacting to decisions rather than helping to shape them⁶⁰.
- **Perceived inconsistencies:** Stakeholder interviews point to a further operational barrier: the difficulty of communicating policy processes that are politically dynamic but publicly presented as stable long-term frameworks. Where climate packages are later revised, renamed, simplified or partially withdrawn, citizens may perceive inconsistency even where changes reflect normal legislative negotiation. This can weaken trust and create space for misleading interpretations, particularly when headline targets are not accompanied by clear explanations of assumptions, safeguards, transition pathways, and practical implications⁶¹.

Several resources have been developed for practitioners to address these barriers. The **European Climate Pact toolkit** is an accessible resource for citizens, Climate Pact Ambassadors, public authorities, civil society organisations and others wishing to communicate about climate action in their communities. It offers practical tips and suggested responses to common arguments used to justify

⁵⁸ European Commission, *A strengthened EU Code of Practice on Disinformation*, n.d., https://commission.europa.eu/topics/countering-information-manipulation/strengthened-eu-code-practice-disinformation_en.

⁵⁹ European Committee of the Regions (CoR), *Handbook on countering online disinformation at the local and regional level*, 2022, <https://case-research.eu/publications/handbook-on-countering-online-disinformation-at-the-local-and-regional-level/>.

⁶⁰ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), 'National and sub-national policies and institutions', in *IPCC 2022: Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change*, Contribution of Working Group III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2022, <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg3/chapter/chapter-13/>.

⁶¹ Stakeholder interview: climate and environmental policy stakeholder, April 2026; Written responses to stakeholder questionnaires: stakeholder active in agriculture-related policy, May 2026; civil society stakeholder, May 2026.

inaction, supporting clearer and more constructive conversations on climate policy⁶². Similarly, the CoR **Handbook on good practice in countering disinformation at local and regional level** offers LRAs concrete recommendations and practical guidance to support their frontline efforts to fight online disinformation⁶³.

1.5 Global disinformation campaigns and climate/biodiversity negotiations

The information environment is not confined by national borders. Content produced abroad can circulate rapidly in domestic debate, while global themes such as fairness, competitiveness, and sovereignty are often reinterpreted through national and local political contexts. These frames are particularly relevant in the context of international climate and biodiversity negotiations.

Climate and biodiversity multilateral negotiations increasingly acknowledge disinformation as a strategic issue. In 2025, the Declaration on Information Integrity on Climate Change (the Declaration) was launched at the 30th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30) within the framework of the Global Initiative for Information Integrity on Climate Change⁶⁴, led by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the UN and Brazil. It establishes shared commitments to counter climate disinformation and promote accurate, evidence-based climate information. The Declaration explicitly recognises that disinformation, misinformation and attacks on scientific and journalistic voices diminish public understanding, delay urgent action, and threaten societal stability⁶⁵. At the COP30 event, officials highlighted that disinformation is undermining international climate policy: according to the COP30 secretary, false narratives ‘delay our response’ to climate change by diverting attention to the ‘wrong issues’⁶⁶. Discussions stressed that coordinated campaigns, often backed by fossil fuel interests or foreign actors, seek to sow doubt about climate science, ‘fuel social polarisation’, and even ‘destabilise democratic processes, including elections’. In this view, climate disinformation

⁶² European Climate Pact, *How to talk to people about climate action*, 16 November 2022, <https://climate-pact.europa.eu/system/files/2022-11/How%20to%20talk%20to%20people%20about%20climate%20action%20toolkit.pdf>.

⁶³ European Committee of the Regions (CoR), *Handbook on countering online disinformation at the local and regional level*, 2022, <https://case-research.eu/publications/handbook-on-countering-online-disinformation-at-the-local-and-regional-level/>.

⁶⁴ UNESCO, *Global Initiative for Information Integrity on Climate Change*, 2025, <https://www.unesco.org/en/information-integrity-climate-change>.

⁶⁵ UNESCO, *Global Initiative for Information Integrity on Climate Change - Declaration on Information Integrity on Climate Change*, November 2025, <https://www.unesco.org/en/information-integrity-climate-change/cop30declaration>.

⁶⁶ Barcellos de Moraes, F., ‘Climate disinformation at the centre of geopolitics: COP30 Presidency leads global coordination on the issue’, COP30 Brazil, 21 June 2025, <https://cop30.br/en/news-about-cop30/climate-disinformation-at-the-center-of-geopolitics-cop30-presidency-leads-global-coordination-on-the-issue>.

has become a geopolitical weapon aimed at weakening trust in the global system of collective action⁶⁷.

EU policy frameworks increasingly treat FIMI and disinformation as challenges to democratic resilience and public decision-making. The European Commission frames it as a serious threat that can undermine democratic institutions and polarise society, and the Council of the EU has underlined that such manipulation is often deployed as part of broader hybrid campaigns designed to mislead and destabilise democratic societies by exploiting existing social and cultural frictions⁶⁸. In parallel, some EU work seeks to map the digital infrastructures and techniques used by foreign actors to interfere in the EU information space⁶⁹. This security and resilience framing is particularly relevant in relation to major international negotiation moments, where attention spikes can create fertile conditions for cross-border narratives to circulate and become domestically salient.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Council of the EU, 'Foreign information manipulation and interference: Council approves conclusions stepping up EU's engagement and ability to respond', Press release, 18 July 2022, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/07/18/foreign-information-manipulation-and-interference-council-approves-conclusions-stepping-up-eu-s-engagement-and-ability-to-respond/>.

⁶⁹ European Union External Action (EEAS), *3rd EEAS Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats*, 19 March 2025, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/3rd-eeas-report-foreign-information-manipulation-and-interference-threats-0_en.

2. Part 2: European Green Deal (EGD) case

This section examines how the EGD has become a prime target for misinformation and disinformation and a broader arena of legitimate political, social and sectoral contestation. It traces the emergence, themes and channels of the campaigns that seek to undermine EGD legitimacy and measures. It also distinguishes between false or misleading claims and good-faith criticism in respect of feasibility, costs, transition timelines, competitiveness, food security, territorial impacts, administrative burden, and the availability of alternatives.

The section documents the roles and perspectives of key stakeholders, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), citizens and affected sectors, and identifies tailored communication strategies suited to diverse audiences, from local communities to sectoral partners and the general public. The analysis diagnoses institutional communication shortcomings that have hampered effective outreach, including delays in messaging, insufficient clarity, and instances of misalignment with public expectations. To ground the assessment in concrete experience, the section distils the lessons learned from narratives, including across political groups (e.g. anti-system actors) deployed around flagship proposals under the EGD (Nature Restoration Law, Sustainable Use of Pesticides initiative, CO₂ emission standards for cars and vans). These cases align with the study's objectives and cover diverse contexts. They illustrate: (i) how narratives around proposals evolved over time, (ii) how disinformation affected them, and (iii) how EU-level actions (including by the European Commission) may have contributed to disinformation dynamics and mistrust.

2.1 Disinformation targeting the EGD

The EGD has increasingly become a focal point for misinformation and disinformation. Its broad policy scope covers energy, industry, agriculture, mobility and land use, exposing it to narratives that **simplify complex measures, amplify perceived trade-offs, and frame the transition in oppositional terms**. This vulnerability must also be understood in light of the context in which many EGD elements were negotiated. Several proposals were tabled before or during the COVID-19 pandemic, but negotiated after the pandemic, the outbreak of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, and related energy price shocks, when renewed debates on trade and competitiveness had significantly altered the political and economic environment⁷⁰. Stakeholder evidence indicates that this shift made some audiences more receptive to narratives linking climate and

⁷⁰ Centrum Analiz Propagandy i Dezinformacji, 'European Green Deal: Mapping Perceptions in Central and Eastern Europe', 20 July 2022, <https://capd.pl/en/reports/319-european-green-deal-mapping-perceptions-in-central-and-eastern-europe>.

environmental policy to food prices, production costs, rural livelihoods, competitiveness, and loss of purchasing power⁷¹.

A recurring EGD narrative portrays climate and environmental measures as inherently **harmful to economic stability, jobs, and/or livelihoods**. Across Member States, narratives have framed EGD policies as economically disproportionate, socially unfair, or detached from local realities, often reducing complex proposals to simplified claims about industrial decline, loss of income, or regulatory overreach⁷². A related narrative frames the EGD as an **external or top-down imposition**, often suggesting that EU institutions are dictating major lifestyle or land-use changes without regard for local conditions⁷³. Stakeholder evidence also suggests that some of these narratives are experienced locally as diffuse or ambient discourse rather than clearly identifiable campaigns, with citizens repeating simplified interpretations of the EGD without a clear original source⁷⁴.

Some disinformation narratives have simplified the EGD around a common enemy or **symbolic target**. They may target climate activists, such as Greta Thunberg, who are used in narratives attacking climate mobilisation more broadly, or EU institutional figures, such as Frans Timmermans or Ursula von der Leyen⁷⁵, who are associated with EU climate policy and decision-making. Broader **conspiratorial framing** around Agenda 2030⁷⁶ can serve a similar function, presenting sustainability or climate policy as part of a hidden project of coercion, social engineering, or authoritarian control.

Stakeholder evidence suggests that for some actors, the early EGD debate was strongly personalised around Frans Timmermans, who was perceived as the main political champion of the agenda. This perception contributed to a broader sense among parts of the agricultural sector that EGD measures were being advanced through a top-down environmental narrative insufficiently attentive to farming realities, production conditions, and food-security concerns⁷⁷. Similar dynamics can be observed where EU institutional representatives are used as symbolic targets in narratives about elite control or the alleged imposition of climate policy.

⁷¹ Written responses to stakeholder questionnaires: agriculture and rural affairs stakeholder, April 2026; stakeholder active in agriculture-related policy, May 2026.

⁷² Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy (GCoM), *Addressing rampant climate disinformation*, October 2024, <https://www.globalcovenantofmayors.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Addressing-Rampant-Climate-Disinformation-FINAL-.pdf>.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Stakeholder interview: climate and environmental policy stakeholder, April 2026.

⁷⁵ Romero-Vicente, A., 'Don't stop me now: the growing disinformation threat against climate change', EU DisinfoLab, 6 February 2023, <https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/dont-stop-me-now-the-growing-disinformation-threat-against-climate-change/>.

⁷⁶ Full Fact, 'Fake UN "Agenda 2030" list circulates again on social media', 28 August 2025, <https://fullfact.org/world/un-agenda-2030-fake-list/>.

⁷⁷ Written response to stakeholder questionnaire: agriculture and rural affairs stakeholder, April 2026.

Criticism of political leadership or policy priorities is part of democratic debate, but such personalisation becomes problematic where it replaces substantive discussion of the measures themselves or is linked to false, conspiratorial or misleading claims.

Misleading claims have circulated around food systems, farming practices, home heating, mobility, and consumer choices, including false allegations that EU rules would ban traditional agriculture or foods, force disruptive dietary shifts, or prohibit common technologies and practices⁷⁸. Stakeholders confirm that concerns about transition timelines, alternatives, economic viability, food security, rural livelihoods, administrative burden, and international reciprocity can be raised in good faith and should be addressed as part of democratic debate. They become problematic where they are presented as absolute trade-offs, detached from evidence, or used to suggest that EU action is futile because emissions continue elsewhere or because other major economies do not act in the same way⁷⁹. Promoting cynicism (e.g. ‘nothing we do will make a difference’), false dichotomies, or selective and misleading framings fosters uncertainty and hesitation, weakening momentum for implementation of the EGD. This dynamic is also evident in narratives around Agenda 2030. Claims portraying it as a hidden project of coercion or authoritarian control constitute disinformation. By contrast, evidence-based criticism of its priorities, governance or distributional effects forms part of legitimate democratic debate.

More conspiratorial narratives continue to circulate in some online environments, linking climate policy to broader claims about hidden agendas, authoritarian control, or large-scale social engineering (including references to geo-engineering, ‘climate lockdowns’ or similar)⁸⁰. While such claims are not representative of mainstream public debate, they can reinforce distrust in institutions and expert knowledge⁸¹.

These narratives spread through diverse channels. Digital platforms, including Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, X, Telegram, TikTok and online news sites, allow accurate information to travel quickly but also enable false or misleading claims to gain visibility before corrections reach the same audiences⁸². This contributes to **cross-border virality**, with narratives originating or amplified in one Member State quickly translated and replicated in others. Organised

⁷⁸ European Commission, ‘Disinfo Bulletin – Issue No. 23’, European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO), 10 May 2024, <https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/edmo/items/830156/en>.

⁷⁹ Written responses to stakeholder questionnaires: agriculture and rural affairs stakeholder, April 2026; stakeholder active in agriculture-related policy, May 2026.

⁸⁰ EU Covenant of Mayors, ‘Building trust in the face of climate disinformation’, n.d., <https://eu-mayors.ec.europa.eu/en/news/building-trust-face-climate-disinformation>.

⁸¹ EU DisinfoLab, ‘HEAT: Harmful Environmental Agendas & Tactics’, 23 June 2025, <https://www.disinfo.eu/heat-harmful-environmental-agendas-and-tactics/>.

⁸² Ibid.

dissemination can further amplify these dynamics: investigations have found that EGD-related falsehoods are sometimes seeded and recirculated by clusters of ideologically aligned accounts and websites, including through coordinated amplification⁸³. Foreign state actors may also contribute. Pro-Kremlin outlets have systematically amplified content attacking the EU's green agenda, and Russian-linked media and proxy platforms have adapted EGD-related disinformation to local contexts, embedding such narratives within domestic debates in EU Member States⁸⁴. Stakeholder evidence indicates that evidence-based actors often struggle to match the speed and scale of platform-native amplification, especially on high-impact platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube, where short-form, emotive and identity-based content can shape public understanding before institutional or expert rebuttals reach wider audiences⁸⁵.

The impact of this sustained disinformation and misinformation targeting the EGD is a matter of serious concern for EU institutions and democratic society. Misleading narratives can **erode confidence** in climate policy, expert knowledge and democratic institutions. They can delay decision-making, complicate implementation, and reduce the political space for evidence-based action⁸⁶, all of which can translate into waning public support for vital measures⁸⁷. The erosion of trust and fact-based dialogue ultimately threatens the ability of democratically elected bodies to build consensus for the EGD, even though a large majority of Europeans agree on the urgency of climate action. This impact is not produced by disinformation alone. Rather, it is reinforced where affected groups feel insufficiently recognised, institutional messages shift abruptly, proposals are negotiated in a changed socioeconomic context without sufficient explanation, or legitimate concerns are not given structured channels for response⁸⁸.

2.2 Stakeholder engagement and targeted communication

The EGD hinges on **broad public support** and **clear, factual information**. Stakeholder engagement and targeted communication is crucial. It is essential to engage diverse actors, from NGOs to local authorities, farming communities, industries and individual citizens, to disseminate accurate information and listen to legitimate concerns. As one analysis notes, countering EGD misinformation

⁸³ EU DisinfoLab, 'HEAT: Harmful Environmental Agendas & Tactics', 23 June 2025, <https://www.disinfo.eu/heat-harmful-environmental-agendas-and-tactics/>.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Written response to stakeholder questionnaire, civil society stakeholder, May 2026.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Stakeholder interview: climate and environmental policy stakeholder, April 2026. Written responses to stakeholder questionnaires: agriculture and rural affairs stakeholder, April 2026; stakeholder active in agriculture-related policy, May 2026; civil society stakeholder, May 2026.

‘requires a multi-stakeholder approach’ that integrates efforts by government, civil society and businesses in a coordinated way⁸⁹.

In such a context, stakeholder perspectives and inputs can diverge significantly. NGOs, research institutes and civil society organisations can play a key role in translating climate science into language and examples that resonate with the public. Environmental NGOs and research institutes often act as **knowledge brokers**: they fact-check misleading claims, promote science-based narratives and organise local events or media campaigns. In many regions, NGO communication efforts complement official messaging. Evidence-based campaigns, such as the EU’s ClimateFactsMatter, often partner with leading NGOs to craft accessible content and media literacy⁹⁰. At the same time, a balanced account should not assume that all NGO communication is inherently accurate or purely corrective. Actors on all sides of a debate may use simplification, storytelling, emotional framing, selective evidence and platform-specific messaging to make complex issues accessible or persuasive. The key analytical distinction is whether claims remain evidence-based, transparent about their assumptions, and open to scrutiny⁹¹.

Citizens themselves may be both a target of misinformation and vital partners in the EGD. Citizen perspectives and values vary widely, and communication must be **tailored to different concerns, information habits, and levels of trust**. Inviting citizens to co-create solutions should focus on tangible transition measures such as local energy projects and energy communities, rather than abstract endorsement of EU objectives. This is consistent with the Commission’s 2025 Action Plan for Affordable Energy⁹², which places lower energy costs and consumer empowerment at the centre of the clean transition. It is also reflected in the Citizens Energy Package⁹³, presented by the Commission in March 2026, which aims to lower energy bills, empower citizens to participate in the clean energy transition, tackle energy poverty, and support energy communities. These examples can help to show that climate action is not solely a regulatory burden, but a source of practical benefits, local ownership and participation.

⁸⁹ Centre for the Study of Democracy, *Countering Green Deal Disinformation Narratives in Bulgaria*, Policy Brief No 124, February 2023, https://csd.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/publications_library/PB124_EN.pdf.

⁹⁰ European Commission, ‘Climate disinformation’, n.d., https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/climate-disinformation_en.

⁹¹ Written response to stakeholder questionnaire: civil society stakeholder, May 2026.

⁹² Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Action Plan for Affordable Energy, COM(2025) 79 final, https://energy.ec.europa.eu/publications/action-plan-affordable-energy-unlocking-true-value-our-energy-union-secure-affordable-efficient-and_en.

⁹³ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, on the Citizens Energy Package’ COM (2026) 115 final https://energy.ec.europa.eu/publications/communication-citizens-energy-package_en.

The agricultural sector is often both a focal point and a casualty of EGD debates. Farmers have real concerns about land use, food prices, regulatory changes, competitiveness, input costs, and the availability of alternatives. Some disinformation campaigns have exploited these concerns, including during farmer protests, by presenting false or exaggerated claims as authentic grievances⁹⁴. At the same time, stakeholder engagement indicates that some farmers and rural actors feel misrecognised or portrayed as environmentally irresponsible, despite their role in environmental stewardship and compliance with EU standards. This **perception of misrecognition** itself contributed to mistrust and polarisation, and should be addressed through dialogue rather than dismissed as misinformation⁹⁵.

A more balanced account should acknowledge communication efforts from farming and livestock sectors. For example, stakeholder engagement referred to the #MeattheFacts campaign as an example of sector-led communication intended to counter myths about meat consumption. Such examples should not be treated as equivalent to institutional fact-checking, but illustrate that affected sectors also seek to influence the information environment and respond to narratives they consider misleading. Including them helps to avoid a one-sided account that frames civil society as purely corrective and farming or livestock actors solely as targets or amplifiers of misinformation⁹⁶.

The EGD places energy, transport and manufacturing at the centre of Europe's decarbonisation agenda, prompting strong engagement from the relevant industrial sectors⁹⁷. Their contributions can help to refine policy, particularly in relation to investment, infrastructure, competitiveness and regulatory certainty. They can also help to avoid clouding the public debate with worries about costs, jobs and disruption that could obscure the practical choices required for an effective transition⁹⁸. A balanced response features **clear, sector-specific communication that acknowledges legitimate concerns** while consistently

⁹⁴ European Fact-Checking Standards Network, 'Farmers' protests weaponised to spread climate misinformation, report from Climate Facts Europe project finds', 3 June 2024, https://efcsn.com/news/2024-06-03_farmers-protests-weaponized-to-spread-climate-misinformation-report-from-climate-facts-europe-project-finds/.

⁹⁵ Written responses to stakeholder questionnaires: agriculture and rural affairs stakeholder, April 2026; stakeholder active in agriculture-related policy, May 2026.

⁹⁶ Written response to stakeholder questionnaire: agriculture and rural affairs stakeholder, April 2026.

⁹⁷ European Commission, 'The European Green Deal', n.d., https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en.

⁹⁸ WindEurope, 'WindEurope's position paper on the EU Green Deal Industrial Plan', 25 May 2023, <https://windeurope.org/data/products/windeurope-s-position-paper-on-the-eu-green-deal-industrial-plan/>; Airlines for Europe, 'A4E's position on the European Green Deal', last updated 8 December 2023, <https://a4e.eu/publications/a4es-position-on-the-european-green-deal/>; European Automobile Manufacturers' Association, 'Strengthening Europe's auto industry through innovation, open markets and pragmatic green policy', 10 February 2026, <https://www.acea.auto/news/strengthening-europes-auto-industry-through-innovation-open-markets-and-pragmatic-green-policy/>; European Commission, 'European Clean Hydrogen Alliance', n.d., https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/industry/industrial-alliances/european-clean-hydrogen-alliance_en; Eurelectric, 'Amp it up: Electrification needs a plan', 17 October 2025, <https://www.eurelectric.org/blog/amp-it-up-electrification-needs-a-plan/>.

grounding the debate in evidence.

Across stakeholder groups, several communication principles are consistently relevant: clarity, consistency, credible messengers, local relevance, two-way engagement, and media literacy⁹⁹. Stakeholder evidence shows that face-to-face engagement can be particularly effective because in-person dialogue tends to be more constructive and accountable than online exchanges. At the same time, evidence-based actors need to be present where public narratives are formed, including short-form and social media platforms. This combination of direct dialogue and platform-native communication is essential to avoid leaving narrative space to misleading or polarising content¹⁰⁰.

Effective communication requires **targeted strategies**, as different audiences respond to different messages, formats, and channels. Public authorities should adapt their outreach to the concerns, language, and media habits of the groups they seek to reach. The EU and its partners already provide a range of supporting resources, including toolkits on recognising disinformation and cross-border fact-checking networks¹⁰¹.

2.3 Institutional communication shortcomings

EU institutions increasingly acknowledge climate disinformation and are taking positive steps to address it. For example, DG CLIMA formally identified disinformation as a key risk to EGD goals and launched public awareness campaigns (#ClimateFactsMatter with EDMO; EU DisinfoLab¹⁰²) to protect citizens against misleading information. However, persistent weaknesses in official communications and aspects of legislative design may affect how green policies are perceived and unintentionally contribute to confusion, polarisation or mistrust. A central issue is whether policy objectives, assumptions, trade-offs, timelines, safeguards and implementation pathways are made sufficiently clear from the outset¹⁰³.

Research shows that specific communications weaknesses and shortcomings can affect how green policies are perceived:

- **Slow and reactive outreach** is a recurring weakness in institutional

⁹⁹ O’Callaghan, K.A., Nunn, P.D., Casey, S., Crimmins, G. and Dugmore, H., ‘Speaking of climate change: reframing effective communication for greater impact’, *Climate*, Vol. 13, Issue 4, 2025, p. 69, <https://doi.org/10.3390/cli13040069>.

¹⁰⁰ Stakeholder interview: climate and environmental policy stakeholder, April 2026; Written response to stakeholder questionnaire: civil society stakeholder, May 2026.

¹⁰¹ European Commission, ‘Climate disinformation’, n.d., https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/climate-disinformation_en.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Written response to stakeholder questionnaire: stakeholder active in agriculture-related policy, May 2026.

communication on the green transition. In several instances, official communication has followed, rather than anticipated, public controversy, with clarification and contextual explanation arriving only after narratives have already hardened in public debate, including during periods of mobilisation around agricultural and environmental measures¹⁰⁴. In a fast-moving information environment, delayed communication can leave an initial interpretive vacuum in which partial, misleading or emotionally charged claims circulate more quickly than formal institutional responses¹⁰⁵.

- **Vague or overly technical language.** The communication of major EU policy initiatives through framework communications and broad policy packages, while institutionally necessary, can make it more difficult for non-specialist audiences to understand the concrete implications of the measures proposed. In the context of the EGD, this has sometimes contributed to a gap between strategic policy framing and public understanding, particularly where technical language, regulatory terminology or long implementation timelines have not been accompanied by sufficiently clear, practical explanation¹⁰⁶. When communication relies heavily on abstract policy framing or specialist vocabulary and concrete examples of day-to-day implications are limited, citizens may remain uncertain about what specific measures mean in practice, creating space for misleading narratives to gain traction.
- **Inconsistent messages and shifting narratives.** Policy reversals and watering-down of proposals have muddled narratives around green policies. For example, in response to disinformation-fuelled protests, the Commission ‘backtracked’ on some planned climate and nature measures¹⁰⁷. Such reversals (even when politically expedient) undermine confidence that the EU’s long-term plans are solid and coherent.
- **Legislative design and sequencing.** Stakeholder evidence suggests that some headline targets, including fixed reduction targets in agriculture, were communicated without sufficient explanation of pathways, safeguards, alternatives or transitional measures. If targets appear predetermined and implementation pathways remain unclear, stakeholders may perceive

¹⁰⁴European Commission: Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, ‘Strategic dialogue on the future of EU agriculture’, 2024, https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/cap-overview/committees-and-expert-groups/strategic-dialogue-future-eu-agriculture_en.

¹⁰⁵ European Court of Auditors (ECA), ‘Have your say!’: *Commission’s public consultations engage citizens, but fall short of outreach activities*, Special Report No 14/2019, 2019, <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eca/special-reports/public-participation-14-2019/en>.

¹⁰⁶ European Commission, ‘Climate change – June 2025’, Eurobarometer survey, 2025, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3472>.

¹⁰⁷ Terroille, C. and Newtral, ‘A fertile ground for disinformation: from spreading climate change misinformation to undermining climate action: how the farmers’ protests were used to influence audiences’, Climate Facts Europe, European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCSN) project, 4 June 2024, <https://efcsn.s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/files/9718fac074e4d5dee49891bc86873c15148a38162137a70e8700d9a2db77b9718ec65d05bb2d185c8767724a7df38aec2f6b70da1898fd8c8ff04d2268005bd.pdf>.

limited space to discuss feasibility, regional diversity or alternative routes to the same objective. This can contribute to polarisation even before disinformation actors intervene¹⁰⁸.

- **Misalignment with public concerns.** Long-term objectives such as climate neutrality by 2050 provide strategic direction, but can appear distant from immediate concerns about energy costs, food prices, transport, jobs or competitiveness if not translated into local and sector-specific implications. When communication does not recognise these concerns, misleading narratives can present climate policy as disconnected from lived realities¹⁰⁹.

Delayed timing, unclear framing, shifting messages, and a tone that can seem top-down may hamper EU outreach and delay green policies. Addressing them requires proactive, transparent and audience-tailored communication to better meet public expectations and reduce the power of misleading claims.

2.4 Narratives and legislative lessons

This section examines the formation of misleading narratives, communication challenges encountered, and legislative lessons from selected flagship proposals under the EGD, i.e. the Nature Restoration Law, the Sustainable Use of Pesticides initiative, and the CO₂ emission standards for cars and vans.

Nature restoration

Box 1. EU Nature Restoration Law case study

1. Narrative formation and spread

A cluster of false, misleading, and highly emotive narratives emerged around the EU Nature Restoration Law (NRL), framing the proposal as a direct threat to food production, farmers' livelihoods, and national economic stability¹¹⁰.

These narratives gained traction because they combined **technical misunderstandings** with themes of strong emotional resonance: loss of control over land, the perceived distance between EU institutions and rural communities, and the concern that environmental objectives were being prioritised over immediate economic needs¹¹¹. As a result, public communication around the proposal became shaped by factual disagreement, as

¹⁰⁸ Written response to stakeholder questionnaire: stakeholder active in agriculture-related policy, May 2026.

¹⁰⁹ European Commission, 'Climate disinformation', n.d., https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/climate-disinformation_en.

¹¹⁰ Carlile, C., 'Scientists condemn "misinformation" used to attack EU reforms to protect nature', *DeSmog*, 14 June 2023, <https://www.desmog.com/2023/06/14/scientists-condemn-misinformation-used-to-attack-eu-reforms-to-protect-nature/>; Siliņš, R. and Puriņa, E., 'Why Green Deal opponents spread fear of food shortages?', *Re:baltica*. 31 October 2025, <https://en.rebaltica.lv/2025/10/why-green-deal-opponents-spread-fear-of-food-shortages/>.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

well as broader narratives of fairness, security, and recognition. The pattern of dissemination broadly tracked the legislative cycle: the narrative emerged following the European Commission's proposal and intensified during the European Parliament and Council of the EU negotiations, with a marked increase in visibility in the run-up to key votes and during wider debates on agriculture and the EGD¹¹².

2. Legitimate concerns and contested framing

Legitimate concerns included land use implications, administrative burden, costs, rural livelihoods, proportionality, national flexibility, and the relationship between restoration obligations and food production. These concerns should be distinguished from claims that the law would inevitably cause food shortages, destroy farming or remove land from production at scale. Stakeholder evidence indicates that some rural actors believed that the **debate did not sufficiently recognise farmers' existing environmental efforts**, which contributed to mistrust and polarisation¹¹³.

3. Actors and strategies involved

The communication dynamics surrounding the NRL involved a wide range of actors, including political representatives, sectoral organisations, advocacy groups, media outlets, and online communities. Misleading narratives were amplified through a combination of channels. The presence of false or misleading claims was an issue, together with movement of simplified narratives between institutional and non-institutional spaces.

In practice, the most visible communication strategies included **short, high-impact claims** (e.g. linking the NRL to 'food shortages' or 'loss of farmland'), **selective use of impact figures** without sufficient methodological context, and repeated **reliance on emotionally salient framing** relating to rural decline and institutional overreach¹¹⁴. These narratives were then amplified through widely used channels, including Facebook, X/Twitter, online news sites, and sectoral press, and reinforced where media coverage reproduced headline claims without clearly distinguishing between verified facts, contested estimates, and political messaging, with similar claims and framings appearing in multiple Member States.

Stakeholder evidence points to an asymmetrical ecosystem in which some opposing actors were effective in leveraging high-reach, algorithm-driven

¹¹² Carlile, C., 'Revealed: meetings blitz between Big Ag and anti-green lawmakers in Europe', *DeSmog*, 4 October 2023, <https://www.desmog.com/2023/10/04/revealed-meetings-blitz-between-big-ag-and-anti-green-lawmakers-in-europe/>.

¹¹³ Written response to stakeholder questionnaire: agriculture and rural affairs stakeholder, April 2026.

¹¹⁴ Seas At Risk, 'Facts prevail over fiction in tight European Parliament vote to restore nature', 20 June 2023, <https://seas-at-risk.org/general-news/facts-prevail-over-fiction-in-tight-european-parliament-vote-to-restore-nature/>.

platforms and targeted messaging, while NGOs and scientific actors relied more on evidence-based communication, coalition-building, and institutional channels. It also confirms that actors on different sides used simplification, storytelling and value-based framing to make complex policy debates accessible¹¹⁵.

4. Socio-political context and public response

The NRL was debated under **heightened sensitivity**: post-COVID-19 pandemic economic pressures, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, high energy and fertiliser prices, inflation, trade liberalisation debates, and the increased political salience of agriculture before the 2024 European Parliament elections. Public concern about pesticide residues and food safety also remained high. The NRL debate unfolded in a socio-political context that increased the resonance of negative and emotional narratives. Across the EU, public concern about inflation, energy prices, food costs and economic uncertainty was already high, making audiences more receptive to claims linking environmental regulation to immediate material hardship¹¹⁶. In parallel, the broader political climate around the EGD had become more contested, with agricultural policy, rural livelihoods, and food security increasingly framed as politically salient issues in advance of the 2024 European Parliament elections¹¹⁷.

During the 2023 co-decision process, the draft NRL was significantly weakened through parliamentary amendments. However, subsequent trilogue negotiations restored a number of those amendments, including broader restoration scope, and certain forest-related provisions¹¹⁸. These legislative changes broadly reflected the competing narratives that shaped public and political debate¹¹⁹. The intensity of the negotiations and repeated revisions raised wider concerns about institutional credibility, with some actors warning that continued renegotiation of agreed text could undermine trust in the EU legislative process and in the Union's broader environmental commitments¹²⁰.

5. Counter-communication strategies

Counter-communication efforts were undertaken by EU institutions, scientific

¹¹⁵ Written response to stakeholder questionnaire: civil society stakeholder, May 2026.

¹¹⁶ De Schutter, O. and Frison, E., 'The EPP group is wrong. The EU's nature restoration law won't lead to a 'global famine', *Euronews*, 9 June 2023, <https://www.euronews.com/2023/06/09/the-epp-group-is-wrong-the-eus-nature-restoration-law-wont-lead-to-a-global-famine>; Decleer, K. and Cliquet, A., 'Nature restoration: proposed EU law under threat', *Nature*, Vol. 619, 2023, p. 252, <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-023-02228-x>.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ European Parliament, 'Proposal for a regulation on nature restoration', Legislative Train Schedule, n.d., <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-a-european-green-deal/file-restoration-of-healthy-ecosystems>.

¹¹⁹ Fleckenstein, S., Schaub, S. and Sotirov, M., 'Forests in the spotlight: discourse coalitions and storylines shaping the EU Nature Restoration Regulation', *Politics and Governance*, Vol. 13, 2025, 10184, <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.10184>.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

communities, civil society organisations and fact-checking actors, but their timing, visibility and reach varied.

Institutional responses included clarifications in parliamentary debate and explanatory communications aimed at correcting misconceptions about the scope of the NRL and its relationship to agricultural land use¹²¹. Scientific and civil society responses were also prominent. **Public letters** and **expert statements** sought to correct claims about food security and agricultural collapse, emphasising that biodiversity loss, soil degradation, and climate impacts are themselves serious risks to agricultural productivity¹²².

These interventions helped to reintroduce evidence-based framing into the debate, especially among media and policy audiences. At the same time, campaign initiatives and coalition messaging (including NGO-led communications around restoration) attempted to translate the policy into more accessible language and reframe the issue in terms of resilience, long-term food security and environmental stability¹²³. Fact-checking and media scrutiny also played a role in documenting and correcting specific claims, including exaggerated estimates and false representations of the law's practical effects¹²⁴. Stakeholder evidence suggests that **explaining trade-offs openly** and **acknowledging limits** proved more constructive than defensive messaging, but that technical evidence was difficult to translate into fast-moving public debate. This underlines the need for accessible dialogue and sector-sensitive communication, in addition to technical correction¹²⁵.

6. Lessons and gaps

The NRL case study highlights a number of lessons for institutional communication around EGD legislation:

- Communication needs to **begin earlier** in the legislative cycle and should anticipate likely areas of confusion or contestation, especially where proposals affect land use, farming or local livelihoods. Here, the absence

¹²¹ Ibid.; European Commission, 'Questions and answers on Nature Restoration Law: restoring ecosystems for people, climate and planet', 22 June 2022,

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_22_3747.

¹²² Carlile, C., 'Scientists condemn "misinformation" used to attack EU reforms to protect nature', *DeSmog*, 14 June 2023, <https://www.desmog.com/2023/06/14/scientists-condemn-misinformation-used-to-attack-eu-reforms-to-protect-nature/>; Pe'er, G. et al., 'Scientists support the EU's Green Deal and reject the unjustified argumentation against the Sustainable Use Regulation and the Nature Restoration Law', *Zenodo*, Version 2, 15 June 2023, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8033784>.

¹²³ Siliņš, R. and Puriņa, E., 'Why Green Deal opponents spread fear of food shortages?', *Re:baltica*, 31 October 2025, <https://en.rebaltica.lv/2025/10/why-green-deal-opponents-spread-fear-of-food-shortages/>.

¹²⁴ The Left, 'Why We Need a Nature Restoration Law – A Fact Check', 7 June 2023,

<https://left.eu/app/uploads/2023/06/factCheck.pdf>; EUagenda, 'Why We Need a Nature Restoration Law – A Fact Check', n.d., <https://euagenda.eu/publications/why-we-need-a-nature-restoration-law-a-fact-check>;

European Commission, 'Questions and answers on Nature Restoration Law: restoring ecosystems for people, climate and planet', 22 June 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_22_3747.

¹²⁵ Written response to stakeholder questionnaire: stakeholder active in agriculture-related policy, May 2026.

of sufficiently early, practical and audience-specific explanation created space for misleading narratives to define the public framing of the law.

- Communication on technically complex environmental legislation should be more explicit about what a proposal does and does not do, using concrete examples relevant to affected sectors and territories. Communication should **combine legal clarity with practical scenarios**, local relevance, and explicit responses to common misconceptions.
- A wider range of stakeholders should be engaged as communication intermediaries, including local and regional actors, farmer representatives, scientific bodies, and trusted sectoral networks.

Pesticides

Box 2. EU Sustainable Use of Pesticides case study

1. Narrative formation and spread:

The Sustainable Use of Pesticides initiative (SUP) sought to translate the Farm to Fork¹²⁶ target of reducing the use and risk of chemical pesticides by 50% by 2030 into binding national commitments. It also sought to strengthen integrated pest management and limit pesticide use in designated ‘sensitive areas’¹²⁷. The proposal quickly became **contested on policy substance** (feasibility, data, alternatives, cost distribution) and through misleading and emotionally framed narratives, in particular claims that the initiative would ‘ban pesticides’ and force a large-scale reduction in EU food production¹²⁸. The food security and competitiveness narrative argued that rapid pesticide reduction would materially reduce yields, increase costs, and weaken EU agriculture¹²⁹. The legislative process culminated in the European Parliament rejecting the SUP in November 2023 and the Commission withdrawing the initiative in 2024.

2. Legitimate concerns and contested framing

Stakeholder evidence points to concerns about the availability and affordability of alternatives, crop yields, farm income, food prices, competitiveness,

¹²⁶ European Commission, ‘A Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system’, COM(2020) 381 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0381>.

¹²⁷ European Commission, ‘Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the sustainable use of plant protection products and amending Regulation (EU) 2021/2115’ COM(2022) 305 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52022PC0305>.

¹²⁸ European Commission, ‘Non-paper on the definition and scope of provisions on sensitive areas in the proposal for a Regulation on the Sustainable Use of Plant Protection Products (SUR)’, January 2023, https://food.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-01/pesticides_sud_sur-non-paper_en.pdf; European Commission, ‘Commission’s reply to Council request to submit a study complementing the impact assessment on SUR’, Letter from Vice-President Šefčovič, 5 July 2023, https://food.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-07/pesticides_sup_commission-response_art-241_vp-to-council.pdf.

¹²⁹ Council Decision (EU) 2022/2572 of 19 December 2022 requesting the Commission to submit a study complementing the impact assessment of the proposal for a regulation on the sustainable use of plant protection products and amending Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 [2022], OJ L 331/6, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022D2572>.

consistency between policies, regional diversity, and the practicality of transition timelines. These concerns should be distinguished from misleading claims that pesticide reduction was either risk-free and immediately substitutable or, conversely, necessarily incompatible with food security. The withdrawal of the proposal should be read as both a consequence of disinformation and an indication that **some feasibility and implementation concerns became politically salient** and were taken into account in the political process¹³⁰.

3. Actors and strategies involved

The debate involved pesticide and agribusiness actors, farmers' organisations, cooperatives, environmental and health NGOs, consumer organisations, scientists, media actors, EU institutions, and national authorities. Communication strategies were not neatly divided between rational evidence on one side and emotional simplification on the other. Stakeholder evidence indicates that emotionally framed and simplified messages were used by NGOs, farmers, industry and political actors, often relying on similar channels and techniques but featuring different evidence bases and values. Messages appealed variously to food security, health, biodiversity, livelihoods, competitiveness, consumer prices and farmer autonomy¹³¹.

4. Socio-political context and public response

The SUP was debated in a context of **heightened sensitivity**: post-COVID-19 pandemic economic pressures, geopolitical disruption following Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, high energy and fertiliser prices, inflation, input-cost increases, trade liberalisation debates, and increasing salience of agriculture in political debate¹³². At the same time, public concern about pesticide residues and food safety was demonstrably high: Special Eurobarometer 97.2 found that 65% of respondents had heard of pesticide residues in food, and that pesticide residues were among the top reported food safety concerns at EU level (40%)¹³³. This dual context of strong public concern about health risks alongside strong concern about food affordability and farm viability made the policy particularly susceptible to polarised framing.

¹³⁰ Written responses to stakeholder questionnaires: stakeholder active in agriculture-related policy, May 2026; agriculture and rural affairs stakeholder, April 2026.

¹³¹ Written responses to stakeholder questionnaires: civil society stakeholder, May 2026; stakeholder active in agriculture-related policy, May 2026.

¹³² Council Decision (EU) 2022/2572 of 19 December 2022 requesting the Commission to submit a study complementing the impact assessment of the proposal for a regulation on the sustainable use of plant protection products and amending Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 [2022], OJ L 331/6, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022D2572>.

¹³³ European Food Safety Authority, *Food safety in the EU*, Special Eurobarometer 97.2, 2022, https://www.qualivita.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Eurobarometro2022-food-safety-in-the-EU_report.pdf.

5. Counter-communication strategies

Institutional responses began with explanatory communications on food security and the promotion of non-chemical alternatives¹³⁴. As contestation increased, the European Commission issued a non-paper on ‘sensitive areas’ to address Member State concerns and reduce misinterpretation¹³⁵. At the request of the Council of the EU, the Commission provided additional analysis in July 2023. It concluded that the reduction objectives would not threaten food security in the longer term and noted Member State flexibility in implementation, while acknowledging limitations in EU comparable data and evidence gaps for small and medium farms¹³⁶.

Civil society and expert counter-messaging included **fact-check style rebuttals** of recurring claims (in particular, that pesticide reduction would jeopardise food security), alongside advocacy to maintain the level of ambition. Related fact-checking in adjacent debates (e.g. claims on imports and pesticide controls in the context of Ukraine-related agricultural controversies) also sought to correct misleading cross-border narratives that contributed to distrust and perceptions of unfair competition¹³⁷.

Stakeholder evidence suggests that **explaining trade-offs openly** and acknowledging limits proved more constructive than defensive messaging, but technical evidence was difficult to translate into fast-moving public debate. This underlines the need for accessible dialogue and sector-sensitive communication, alongside technical correction¹³⁸.

6. Lessons and gaps

Several actionable lessons emerge for institutional communication relevant to local and regional governance:

- Legislative design and parliamentary dynamics can affect public understanding. According to some stakeholders, the use of a fixed headline reduction target focused attention on delivery, leaving limited

¹³⁴ European Commission, ‘Reducing the risk and the use of pesticides’, Factsheet, 21 June 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/fs_22_3690.

¹³⁵ European Commission, ‘Non-paper on the definition and scope of provisions on sensitive areas in the proposal for a Regulation on the Sustainable Use of Plant Protection Products (SUR)’, January 2023, https://food.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-01/pesticides_sud_sur-non-paper_en.pdf.

¹³⁶ European Commission, ‘Commission’s reply to Council request to submit a study complementing the impact assessment on SUR’, Letter from Vice-President Šefčovič, 5 July 2023, https://food.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-07/pesticides_sup_commission-response_art-241_vp-to-council.pdf.

¹³⁷ Nikolova, V., ‘War of grains: disinfo about the Ukrainian grain on the “Eastern front” of the EU’, *Factcheck.bg*, 15 May 2023, <https://factcheck.bg/en/war-of-grains-disinfo-about-the-ukrainian-grain-on-the-eastern-front-of-the-eu/>; GLOBAL 2000, *Argument & Fact Check: Post-truth rhetoric on EU pesticide reduction*, 15 March 2023, https://www.global2000.at/sites/global/files/draft-SUR%20argument%20check_150323.pdf.

¹³⁸ Written responses to stakeholder questionnaires: agriculture and rural affairs stakeholder, April 2026; stakeholder active in agriculture-related policy, May 2026.

room to discuss underlying assumptions, feasibility or alternative pathways¹³⁹. **Lack of dialogue** between polarised actors and institutions can contribute significantly to the withdrawal proposals.

- Clarify **what the proposal does/does not do** from the outset. The ‘ban’ narrative illustrates how technical provisions (e.g. ‘sensitive areas’) can be interpreted as blanket prohibitions unless communicated early with practical examples and clear geographical scope explanations.
- Strengthen **two-way engagement** rather than episodic rebuttal. Withdrawal was publicly framed as linked to polarisation and insufficient progress. Sustained engagement with rural communities and smallholders, in particular, can reduce the likelihood that late-stage clarifications are perceived as defensive rather than informative.

Emission standards

Box 3. CO₂ emission standards for cars and vans case study

1. Narrative formation and spread

Regulation (EU) 2019/631 on CO₂ emission standards for new cars and vans (the Regulation) set ambitious targets: 55% average emissions reduction by 2030 and 100% reduction (zero emissions) by 2035 for new vehicles¹⁴⁰. Public debate has included a range of misleading narratives, with some claims suggesting that the EU would ‘ban’ petrol/diesel cars in general or require owners to scrap existing vehicles, and others asserting that electric vehicles are inherently unsafe or ineffective¹⁴¹. One prominent narrative framed the standards as economically damaging, arguing that phasing out internal combustion engines would ‘achieve nothing’ for the climate while destroying jobs. Messages warning of factory closures, job losses, and higher consumer costs gained traction, particularly among audiences concerned about living costs and employment¹⁴².

A further narrative focused portrayed the standards as a ‘Brussels diktat’ and a symbol of elite-driven policymaking. Studies report that anti-establishment actors explicitly opposed the internal combustion engine phase-out as an overreach¹⁴³, sometimes linking it to other contested measures and framing it as

¹³⁹ Written response to stakeholder questionnaire: stakeholder active in agriculture-related policy, May 2026.

¹⁴⁰ European Commission, ‘Cars and vans: CO₂ emission standards’, Climate Action – Transport, n.d., https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/transport-decarbonisation/road-transport/cars-and-vans_en.

¹⁴¹ European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCSN), ‘Who’s afraid of the electric car? The narrative war delaying climate action in Europe’, 2 July 2025, https://efcsn.com/news/2025-07-02_whos-afraid-of-the-electric-car-the-narrative-war-delaying-climate-action-in-europe/.

¹⁴² Ibid.; Hochschule der Medien Stuttgart, ‘Mostly false: A ban on new internal combustion engine cars achieves nothing for the climate’, EU Fact Check, 12 February 2026, <https://eufactcheck.eu/factcheck/mostly-false-a-ban-on-new-internal-combustion-engine-cars-achieves-nothing-for-the-climate/>.

¹⁴³ Dirkx, M. and Wettengel, J., ‘Right-wing populists challenge Europe’s climate efforts’, *Clean Energy Wire*, 7 June 2024, <https://www.cleanenergywire.org/news/right-wing-populists-challenge-europes-climate-efforts>.

a **restriction on personal freedom**. This broader framing of climate policies being imposed by distant institutions proved salient beyond the technical content of the Regulation, including in rural and working-class communities¹⁴⁴.

2. Legitimate concerns and contested framing

Legitimate concerns in this case included the affordability of electric vehicles, charging infrastructure, rural and peri-urban mobility, consumer choice, regional employment, skills, industrial competitiveness and the pace of transition in automotive regions. These concerns should be distinguished from misleading claims that existing cars would be banned or that the regulation would have no climate relevance. The 2035 ban narrative should also be treated carefully because it was driven in part by **media simplification** of a technically specific rule on new vehicles placed on the market.

3. Actors and strategies involved

A range of actors contributed to shaping and amplifying the narratives around the CO₂ standards for cars and vans. Political actors and sectoral stakeholders promoted emotive framings of the ‘2035 ban’ narrative and, more broadly, concerns about jobs, costs, safety and consumer choice¹⁴⁵. Dissemination occurred primarily through **online channels**, facilitating rapid circulation and cross-border replication of recurring claims¹⁴⁶.

4. Socio-political context and public response

The CO₂ standards were debated in a context marked by economic pressure and political contestation. **Shifting political dynamics** in the mid-2020s contributed to polarised public messaging, with climate and mobility policies frequently framed through an electoral lens¹⁴⁷. At the same time, high energy and fuel prices in 2022–2024 heightened sensitivity to measures perceived as increasing household costs, creating receptive conditions for narratives emphasising affordability, rural mobility, and distributional impacts.

Overall, public attitudes reflected a mixed picture: broad support for climate action and clean air, alongside strong expectations of a just transition and uneven confidence in implementation. Legitimate concerns about costs and jobs sometimes overlapped with, and were amplified by, misleading claims, contributing to a fragmented public discourse in which simplified narratives

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCNSN), ‘Who’s afraid of the electric car? The narrative war delaying climate action in Europe’, 2 July 2025, https://efcsn.com/news/2025-07-02_whos-afraid-of-the-electric-car-the-narrative-war-delaying-climate-action-in-europe/.

¹⁴⁷ Dirkx, M. and Wettengel, J., ‘Right-wing populists challenge Europe’s climate efforts’, *Clean Energy Wire*, 7 June 2024, <https://www.cleanenergywire.org/news/right-wing-populists-challenge-europes-climate-efforts>.

could gain traction¹⁴⁸.

5. Counter-communication strategies

Once misleading narratives became apparent, fact-checkers and media outlets **traced and debunked viral claims**, including the reuse of misleading imagery, and published corrective content. Civil society organisations also disseminated evidence-based materials (e.g. life-cycle emissions comparisons) to counter recurring myths¹⁴⁹. Stakeholder engagement activities, often at local and regional level, supported dialogue with affected groups and helped to identify practical concerns (e.g. infrastructure, usability) that could inform more targeted communication¹⁵⁰.

6. Lessons and gaps

The case highlights a number of lessons for institutional communication around EGD legislation

- Clarity on content: The ‘EU ban’ myth underlines the need for consistently clear messaging.
- Messages about new business opportunities for EU industry may be legitimate as industrial-policy communication¹⁵¹. However, if not paired with clear explanations of **domestic transition pathways**, regional employment impacts and support for affected territories, they can contribute to confusion or perceptions that benefits accrue elsewhere while costs are borne locally.
- Use of **credible and diverse messengers**: Relying exclusively on EU-level voices can unintentionally reinforce perceptions of distance. Working with trusted local and sectoral messengers such as mayors, engineers, trade unions, consumer organisations, and health professionals, can improve reach and credibility, particularly where the debate is shaped by everyday mobility realities.
- Monitoring and rapid responsiveness: The discussion illustrates that misleading claims can surge quickly around key milestones (e.g. votes or announcements). More **agile monitoring** and rapid-response capacity combining communication and analytical expertise can support timely clarifications before narratives consolidate.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCSN), ‘Who’s afraid of the electric car? The narrative war delaying climate action in Europe’, 2 July 2025, https://efcsn.com/news/2025-07-02_whos-afraid-of-the-electric-car-the-narrative-war-delaying-climate-action-in-europe/.

¹⁵⁰ European Committee of the Regions (CoR), ‘Vehicle emissions: new EU regulation mobilises Automotive Regions Alliance to make industry green’, 14 February 2023, <https://cor.europa.eu/en/news/vehicle-emissions-new-eu-regulation-mobilises-automotive-regions-alliance-make-industry-green>.

¹⁵¹ European Commission, *Impact Assessment Report Accompanying the Proposal for a Regulation on type-approval of motor vehicles and engines and of systems, components and separate technical units intended for such vehicles, with respect to their emissions and battery durability (Euro 7)*, SWD(2022) 359 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52022SC0359>.

3. Part 3: Local and regional authorities (LRAs) as frontline actors

This section analyses the LRAs in countering climate- and environment-related disinformation and in building public trust. It examines how LRAs leverage proximity to citizens, local knowledge, and multi-level governance channels to detect emerging narratives, correct misleading claims, and convene credible messengers (schools, health services, civil society, local media, etc.) to deliver timely, evidence-based information. It then presents five best practices illustrating effective communication and engagement strategies led or coordinated by LRAs.

3.1 Role of LRAs

Misinformation and disinformation pose significant challenges for LRAs and the communities they serve, especially in areas already exposed to climate change and environmental pressures¹⁵². From local and regional perspectives, narratives that exploit community identities, socio-political tensions or local fears can be particularly persuasive because they **resonate with lived experience**¹⁵³. Their impact can strain LRA resources, deepen existing divisions or create new ones, and weaken local capacity to deliver essential services¹⁵⁴. As highlighted by the CoR, disinformation can also affect local communities' social condition, ultimately impacting citizens' quality of life¹⁵⁵.

LRAs are particularly well placed to provide contextualised, meaningful responses to these complex issues. Surveys consistently show that LRAs are the most trusted level of government and play a critical role in implementing EU legislation and strategies¹⁵⁶. Their proximity to local communities and their active

¹⁵² United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 'What are climate misinformation and disinformation and how can we tackle them?', 2025, <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/what-are-climate-misinformation-and-disinformation-and-how-can-we-tackle-them>; Stakeholder interview: climate and environmental policy stakeholder, April 2026; Written response to stakeholder questionnaire: agriculture and rural affairs stakeholder, April 2026.

¹⁵³ Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions, 'Municipal matters – building capacity for local climate conversations', University of British Columbia, 2025, <https://democracy.ubc.ca/publications/municipal-matters-building-capacity-for-local-climate-conversations/>; Written response to stakeholder questionnaire: agriculture and rural affairs stakeholder, April 2026.

¹⁵⁴ Local Government Association, United Kingdom (UK) 'A guide to disinformation affecting local authorities and their communities', n.d., <https://www.local.gov.uk/guide-disinformation-affecting-local-authorities-and-their-communities>.

¹⁵⁵ European Committee of the Regions (CoR), 'Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions on tackling online disinformation: a European approach', COR 2018/03908, OJ C 168, 16.5.2019, pp. 15-20, paragraph 25, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52018IR3908>.

¹⁵⁶ European Committee of the Regions (CoR), Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX), 'Developing a handbook on good practice in countering disinformation at local and regional levels', 2022, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f9a58050-0640-11ed-acce-01aa75ed71a1> ; European Committee of the Regions (CoR), *The state of regions and cities – EU annual report 2025*, 2025, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ad58c4fb-beb1-11f0-a612-01aa75ed71a1/language-en?WT.mc_id=SelectedPublications&WT.ria_c=125603&WT.ria_f=9699&WT.ria_ev=search&WT.URL=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cor.europa.eu%2F; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 'What are climate misinformation and disinformation and how can we tackle them?', 2025, <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/what-are-climate->

role in translating broad climate policies into concrete local actions position them at the forefront of efforts to address misinformation and disinformation.

Firstly, LRAs can support the information ecosystem by detecting and countering disinformation early, while communicating climate policies in ways that are clear, trusted and locally relevant. Their proximity to communities, decentralised authority, and understanding of territorial realities mean that they are well placed to identify and report emerging false or misleading narratives before they spread widely¹⁵⁷. They also play a pivotal role in **limiting the spread of false claims** by providing accurate, evidence-based information on policies and solutions in their own communication channels and through targeted local measures adapted to specific audiences¹⁵⁸. LRAs can partner with fact-checking organisations to pool expertise, accelerate responses and increase impact. Tools such as EDMO's network of national fact-checkers¹⁵⁹ and dedicated disinformation reporting channels can help to identify, verify and address false or misleading narratives more rapidly. Cooperation across local, regional, national and wider networks can also ensure a more coordinated response to emerging misinformation and disinformation trends, while reinforcing public trust and building broader coalitions for inclusive climate action.

Secondly, LRAs can leverage their credibility and understanding of local concerns to proactively provide citizens with clear, accurate and locally relevant information¹⁶⁰. A key strategy is **pre-bunking**: anticipating misleading narratives by informing the public in advance about likely forms of disinformation, how to recognise them, and what evidence-based information is available¹⁶¹. This pre-emptive approach is particularly valuable for politically sensitive issues such as climate change, as it can raise awareness before debates become too polarised, thereby avoiding defensive discourses that may be perceived as partisan, more emotional or less trustworthy.

[misinformation-and-disinformation-and-how-can-we-tackle-them](#); Castán Broto, V., Westman, L. and Ruiz Campillo, X., 'The role of local governments in international climate policy', in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Climate Science*, Oxford University Press, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228620.013.842>.

¹⁵⁷ Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR CCRE), 'Local truth, shared trust: Tackling mis/disinformation from the local level', 2025, <https://ccre-cemr.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Local-truth-shared-trust-EN.pdf>.

¹⁵⁸ European Commission, 'Building trust in the face of climate disinformation', 2026, <https://eu-mayors.ec.europa.eu/en/news/building-trust-face-climate-disinformation>; European Committee of the Regions (CoR), Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX), 'Developing a handbook on good practice in countering disinformation at local and regional levels', 2022, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f9a58050-0640-11ed-acce-01aa75ed71a1>; European Committee of the Regions (CoR), 'The state of regions and cities – EU annual report 2025', 2025, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ad58c4fb-beb1-11f0-a612-01aa75ed71a1/language-en?WT.mc_id=Selectedpublications&WT.ria_c=125603&WT.ria_f=9699&WT.ria_ev=search&WT.URL=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cor.europa.eu%2F.

¹⁵⁹ European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO), 'EDMO Hubs', n.d., <https://edmo.eu/about-us/edmo-hubs/>.

¹⁶⁰ Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR CCRE), 'Local truth, shared trust: Tackling mis/disinformation from the local level', 2025, <https://ccre-cemr.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Local-truth-shared-trust-EN.pdf>.

¹⁶¹ Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions, 'Municipal matters – Building capacity for local climate conversations', University of British Columbia, 2025, <https://democracy.ubc.ca/publications/municipal-matters-building-capacity-for-local-climate-conversations/>; Written response to stakeholder questionnaire: agriculture and rural affairs stakeholder, April 2026.

Thirdly, as the level of government closest to citizens, LRAs can play a crucial role in **fostering public engagement and participation**. By engaging with communities, LRAs can design climate resilience actions that are context-specific and tailored to local needs, vulnerabilities and lived realities. This includes supporting local media ecosystems, opening structured public dialogue, and using participative democracy tools such as consultation. LRAs can also engage diverse groups through targeted initiatives, including youth-focused approaches such as the Youth Engagement Playbook for Cities, which supports the meaningful participation of young people in public debate and climate action¹⁶².

Inclusive public engagement is especially important because the impacts of disinformation are not evenly distributed. National debates and large-scale responses may overlook how misleading narratives affect different territories or vulnerable groups. LRAs can help to identify these local vulnerabilities and adapt broader climate objectives accordingly, particularly in areas where communities may be more exposed to economic, social or environmental pressures¹⁶³. Stakeholder evidence suggests that sensitivity to misinformation may be linked to limited digital and media literacy, old age, and residence in remote areas¹⁶⁴, all of which can influence how environmental initiatives are perceived and whether citizens support change.

Participatory democracy plays a key role in building trust and mutual understanding between citizens and local authorities. Through public dialogue, consultation, and deliberation processes, LRAs can involve communities in implementing climate initiatives, sustain public interest, and strengthen the democratic legitimacy of local climate action¹⁶⁵.

Public engagement requires **preparedness and training**. LRAs must be equipped to engage constructively with citizens, notably where discussions involve diverse, unscripted views or unexpected opposition¹⁶⁶. Stakeholders note that in the context of the EGD, shifts in EU-level political narratives affected local perceptions of the strategy, making it appear less consistent and robust. This changed the nature of local communication: representatives were pushed from a

¹⁶² C40 Knowledge Hub, 'Youth Engagement Playbook for Cities: How to tackle the climate crisis through collaboration with youth', 2021, https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/article/Youth-Engagement-Playbook-for-Cities-How-to-tackle-the-climate-crisis-through-collaboration-with-youth?language=en_US.

¹⁶³ European Committee of the Regions (CoR), Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX), 'Developing a handbook on good practice in countering disinformation at local and regional levels', 2022, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f9a58050-0640-11ed-acce-01aa75ed71a1> ; European Committee of the Regions (CoR), *The state of regions and cities – EU annual report 2025*, 2025, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ad58c4fb-beb1-11f0-a612-01aa75ed71a1/language-en?WT.mc_id=Selectedpublications&WT.ria_c=125603&WT.ria_f=9699&WT.ria_ev=search&WT.URL=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cor.europa.eu%2F.

¹⁶⁴ Stakeholder interview: climate and environmental policy stakeholder, April 2026.

¹⁶⁵ Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR CCRE), 'Local truth, shared trust: Tackling mis/disinformation from the local level', 2025, <https://ccre-cemr.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Local-truth-shared-trust-EN.pdf>.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

proactive position, focused on promoting a credible policy agenda, into a defensive role, having to justify political change¹⁶⁷. Stakeholders stressed that contextualised narratives are as important as accurate information and scientific evidence. Climate and environmental policies are more likely to gain public support when they are communicated in ways that reflect citizens' concerns about fairness, livelihoods and security¹⁶⁸. Resources such as the European Commission toolkit, How to talk to people about climate action¹⁶⁹, can support LRAs to engage effectively with citizens without creating information fatigue.

Lastly, beyond communication preparedness, effective public engagement also depends on civil society's capacity to recognise, respond to, and counter disinformation in climate and environmental debates. This level of participation and engagement can only be achieved through parallel **civil society empowerment**. Several tools and actionable options are available to LRAs to build stakeholders' capacity to get involved in climate and environmental discussions, notably educational measures and training, multi-layer partnerships, and the use of EU funding.

As the CoR noted in 2019, LRAs' responsibilities in primary and secondary education place them in a strong position to promote media and digital literacy from an early age¹⁷⁰. Integrating media literacy into school curricula can help young people to assess online information critically, distinguish reliable from unreliable sources, and build long-term resilience against misinformation and disinformation.

European Commission tools can support teachers to strengthen media and digital literacy in schools¹⁷¹. Beyond formal education, LRAs can develop tailored media literacy initiatives for wider audiences, drawing on guidance such as EDMO's Guidelines for Effective Media Literacy Initiatives¹⁷². These set out core principles for effective training, including targeted and evidence-based design, clear objectives, public consultation, transparency, adaptability, and continuous evaluation. Such programmes can be particularly valuable in remote areas or among groups with lower levels of media and digital literacy, helping citizens to build critical thinking skills and long-term resilience against misinformation and

¹⁶⁷ Stakeholder interview: climate and environmental policy stakeholder, April 2026; Written response to stakeholder questionnaire: civil society stakeholder, May 2026.

¹⁶⁸ Written response to stakeholder questionnaire: civil society stakeholder, May 2026.

¹⁶⁹ European Commission, 'How to talk to people about climate action toolkit', European Climate Pact, 2022, https://climate-pact.europa.eu/get-inspired/how-talk-people-about-climate-action_en.

¹⁷⁰ European Committee of the Regions (CoR), 'Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions on – Tackling online disinformation: a European approach', COR 2018/03908, OJ C 168, 16.5.2019, pp. 15-20, paragraphs 31 and 31, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52018IR3908>.

¹⁷¹ European Commission, 'Toolkit for teachers – How to spot and fight disinformation', European School Education Platform, 2024, <https://school-education.ec.europa.eu/en/discover/publications/toolkit-teachers-how-spot-and-fight-disinformation>.

¹⁷² European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO), 'EDMO Guidelines for Effective Media Literacy Initiatives', 2024, <https://edmo.eu/areas-of-activities/media-literacy/raising-standards-the-edmo-guidelines/>.

disinformation.

Local media are key players in the information ecosystem and a cornerstone of local democracy¹⁷³. By debunking false claims and providing locally relevant context to national and EU-level debates, they can serve as an important counterweight to misinformation and disinformation¹⁷⁴. LRAs can help to safeguard local media pluralism and independence, particularly in ‘media deserts’, where the absence of trusted local sources creates space for misleading narratives to spread¹⁷⁵. Supporting robust, independent and pluralistic local media is central to ensuring that evidence-based information remains visible in public debate and that communities have access to trusted sources capable of countering online disinformation¹⁷⁶.

LRAs can rely on multi-level partnership opportunities to enhance cooperation against misinformation or disinformation campaigns. By leveraging **existing networks of trusted actors** such as professional organisations, fact-checkers or civil society organisations, LRAs can strengthen their media literacy efforts, maximise counter measures’ outreach, and build trust across sectors, communities and territories. This ultimately improves citizens’ ability to navigate and critically assess online information¹⁷⁷. Such networks can also improve the quality, accessibility and consistency of public information, helping citizens to better navigate and critically assess online content¹⁷⁸. Beyond public-private cooperation, stronger coordination among local, regional, and European institutions is also essential¹⁷⁹. In this context, the European Committee of the Regions plays a key role as a forum for dialogue, exchange of good practices, and coordinated action among LRAs.

¹⁷³ European Committee of the Regions (CoR), ‘Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions on – Tackling online disinformation: a European approach’, COR 2018/03908, OJ C 168, 16.5.2019, pp. 15-20, paragraph 22, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52018IR3908>.

¹⁷⁴ European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), ‘Key theme – Contribution to public debate: Journalists and other actors’, *ECHR-KS*, last updated 31 August 2026, <https://ks.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr-ks/contributions-to-public-debate-journalists-and-other-actors>.

¹⁷⁵ Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR CCRE), ‘Local truth, shared trust: Tackling mis/disinformation from the local level’, 2025, <https://ccre-cemr.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Local-truth-shared-trust-EN.pdf>.

¹⁷⁶ Written response to stakeholder questionnaire: civil society stakeholder, May 2026.

¹⁷⁷ Written responses to stakeholder questionnaires: agriculture and rural affairs stakeholder, April 2026; stakeholder active in agriculture-related policy, May 2026; Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR CCRE), ‘Local truth, shared trust: Tackling mis/disinformation from the local level’, 2025, <https://ccre-cemr.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Local-truth-shared-trust-EN.pdf>; C40 Knowledge Hub, ‘Youth Engagement Playbook for Cities: How to tackle the climate crisis through collaboration with youth’, 2021, https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/article/Youth-Engagement-Playbook-for-Cities-How-to-tackle-the-climate-crisis-through-collaboration-with-youth?language=en_US.

¹⁷⁸ Written response to stakeholder questionnaire: agriculture and rural affairs stakeholder, April 2026.

¹⁷⁹ European Committee of the Regions (CoR), ‘Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions on – Tackling online disinformation: a European approach’, COR 2018/03908, OJ C 168, 16.5.2019, pp. 15-20, paragraph 26, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52018IR3908>.

Box 4. The Rural Pact as an example of multi-level partnership

Launched in 2021, the Rural Pact provides a cooperation framework between public authorities, civil society, businesses, academia and citizens, at all levels of governance, including regional and local level¹⁸⁰. This community-building initiative gathers stakeholders together and establishes open dialogue in favour of the development of rural areas. The network already contributes to the promotion of climate initiatives and can be further leveraged to raise awareness and empower regional and local stakeholders to inform communities or counter disinformation in rural areas. In 2025, the European Commission announced its intention to use the Rural Pact network to address the targeted spread of disinformation in rural areas¹⁸¹.

The European Commission offers **various funding opportunities to support media literacy and foster open public debates** at local level. By leveraging these EU funds, LRAs can enhance their capacity to combat disinformation and promote media literacy in their communities. Notably, the Cross-border Media Literacy Call for Proposals encourages projects that improve media literacy across borders, encouraging cross-border cooperation, including at local level¹⁸². Additionally, the European Commission recently announced to the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) network its intention to increase the role of the LEADER programme to finance tailored initiatives tackling disinformation in rural areas¹⁸³.

3.2 Tools and best practices for public engagement

In addition to the examples in the CoR Handbook on good practice in countering disinformation at local and regional levels¹⁸⁴, the following illustrate how LRAs have combined and leveraged the tools and strategies described in the previous section to effectively counter climate disinformation.

¹⁸⁰ European Commission, 'Rural Pact Community Platform', n.d., https://ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu/rural-pact_en.

¹⁸¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, 'A vision for Agriculture and Food Shaping together an attractive farming and agrifood sector for future generations', COM/2025/75 final, 19.2.2025, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52025DC0075>.

¹⁸² European Commission, 'Call for Proposals – Cross-border Media Literacy', 21 October 2025, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/funding/call-proposals-cross-border-media-literacy>.

¹⁸³ EU CAP Network, 'Report Subgroup on LEADER and territorial development – 3rd meeting – 5-6 March 2025', 2025, https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/publications/3rd-meeting-subgroup-leader-and-territorial-development_en#section--resources.

¹⁸⁴ European Committee of the Regions (CoR), Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX), 'Developing a handbook on good practice in countering disinformation at local and regional levels', 2022, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f9a58050-0640-11ed-acce-01aa75ed71a1>; European Committee of the Regions (CoR), *The state of regions and cities – EU annual report 2025*, 2025, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ad58c4fb-beb1-11f0-a612-01aa75ed71a1/language-en?WT.mc_id=Selectedpublications&WT.ria_c=125603&WT.ria_f=9699&WT.ria_ev=search&WT.URL=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cor.europa.eu%2F.

Countering disinformation

Box 5 presents some best practices used by LRAs to provide accessible, evidence-based information to correct false claims, prevent misleading narratives from spreading, and support informed public engagement. These are particularly relevant to the EGD and future climate initiatives because they show how LRAs can create the conditions for more transparent, trusted and socially accepted implementation of climate and energy transition measures at local level.

Box 5. Best practices implemented by LRAs to counter disinformation

Illustrative practices and examples

In Germany, the Regional Agency for Climate and Energy of Baden-Württemberg (KEA-BW) developed an **online knowledge portal**¹⁸⁵ to support municipalities and citizens in the climate and energy transition. The portal brings together podcasts, examples of successful local initiatives, Q&A materials, publications, and practical guidance. Resources include online and downloadable fact-checking sheets that address recurring misconceptions and disinformation narratives on issues such as climate protection in transport or wind energy¹⁸⁶. These materials combine clear explanations of climate transition measures with factual counterclaims, evidence and links to authoritative sources. They respond to frequently raised concerns, including health, biodiversity, forest use, recycling, costs, tourism, property values, and security of energy supply.

This practice is both corrective and preventive. It debunks inaccurate narratives while equipping municipalities, stakeholders and citizens with evidence-based arguments and reusable communication material for public debate. By ensuring that reliable information is accessible, practical and up-to-date, the portal can help to prevent misinformation from delaying or weakening local climate action.

In Italy, two local initiatives show how municipalities can counter climate related misinformation and disinformation through public events in trusted community spaces. In Florence, the municipal library and the local district authority, *Quartiere 4 Isolotto-Legnaia*, co-organised a **scientific conference**,

¹⁸⁵ Climate and Energy Agency – Baden-Württemberg (KEA-BW), Knowledge Portal (*Wissensportal*), n.d., <https://www.kea-bw.de/erneuerbare-bw/wissensportal>.

¹⁸⁶ Climate and Energy Agency – Baden-Württemberg (KEA-BW), ‘Fact check: Climate protection in transport (*Faktencheck Klimaschutz im Verkehr*)’, n.d., <https://www.kea-bw.de/nachhaltige-mobilitaet/wissensportal/faktencheck-klimaschutz-im-verkehr#c7086-content-2>; Climate and Energy Agency – Baden-Württemberg (KEA-BW), ‘Frequently expressed claims about wind energy and the corresponding facts and background information (*Klartext zur Windenergie Häufig geäußerte Aussagen zur Windenergie und die dazugehörigen Fakten und Hintergründe*)’, n.d., <https://www.kea-bw.de/erneuerbare-bw/wissensportal/publikationen#c13274-content-3>.

‘It has always been hot! and other convenient lies about climate change’¹⁸⁷. The event addressed common falsehoods and distortions about the climate crisis in a public-friendly format. It brought together a meteorologist and climatologist from the National Research Council, the Institute of BioEconomy and the Environmental Monitoring and Modeling Laboratory for the Sustainable Development (LaMMA Consortium), as well as the President of the Italian Climate Network, also a researcher at the European University Institute. The discussion was moderated by the President of the Environment Commission of the district authority. A similar initiative was hosted by the municipal library of Pavia, involving a local medical doctor, scholar and author specialised in science fiction¹⁸⁸. Through an **article** shared with the public, the guests addressed climate denial narratives in an accessible way, combining reflections on climate disinformation with reading suggestions. The initiative was developed through three episodes of the **library podcast**, *Voci dalla Bonetta*¹⁸⁹, and a short downloadable background note, helping users to understand climate disinformation and the arguments used by climate change deniers.

Both Italian initiatives sought to challenge climate-related disinformation by bringing reliable, science-based information directly to citizens through accessible local institutions and credible public voices. The Florence conference created space for direct public discussion with trusted experts, while the Pavia initiative used cultural and educational content to promote critical thinking and broaden access to evidence-based information through follow-up articles, podcasts and reading materials.

Transferable lessons for LRAs

These practices show that LRAs can counter climate-related disinformation through **structured digital knowledge resources and locally rooted public engagement**. The first transferable lesson is the importance of making evidence-based information practical, accessible, and reusable. The KEA-BW portal demonstrates how factchecks, Q&A formats, downloadable materials, and examples of local initiatives can support municipalities to respond to recurring claims and concerns around climate measures.

The second transferable lesson is the value of **trusted local spaces and credible voices**. The Italian examples show that municipal libraries can act as accessible venues for public education, scientific dissemination and critical thinking. By

¹⁸⁷ Municipality of Florence, ‘It’s always been hot!: BiblioteCaNova debunks climate myths’ (*Ha sempre fatto caldo!: A BiblioteCa Nova si smontano le false credenze sul clima*), 2025, <https://quartieri.comune.fi.it/dalle-redazioni/ha-sempre-fatto-caldo-bibliotecanova-si-smontano-le-false-credenze-sul-clima>.

¹⁸⁸ Municipality of Pavia, ‘The climate, the ostriches and the lies (*Il clima, gli struzzi e le bugie*)’, 2024, <https://biblioteche.comune.pavia.it/blog/il-clima-gli-struzzi-e-le-bugie>.

¹⁸⁹ Biblioteca Bonetta-Archivio storico civico, ‘Voci della Bonnetta channel’, *Youtube*, n.d., <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLFqR7Tx2JtJq0HvQo4aieXHe9SNXtZS0R>.

involving experts, moderators and locally recognised institutions, LRAs can help citizens to distinguish between scientific evidence and misleading claims in a setting that is less formal than institutional communication.

The third transferable lesson is the **usefulness of combined formats**. In-person events can generate dialogue and trust, while podcasts, articles and downloadable notes allow content to remain available beyond a single event and reach audiences with different information habits. These examples show that countering disinformation does not always require large-scale campaigns. It can also be supported through targeted, contextualised and repeatable actions that combine evidence, accessibility, local trust and sustained communication.

Building trust

In the context of disinformation, trust is not built through communication alone, but depends on whether public authorities are perceived as credible, consistent, fair and responsive to local concerns. LRAs can strengthen trust by identifying communities that may be more vulnerable to misinformation and disinformation, addressing misleading narratives early, and equipping citizens with the skills to assess information critically. Box 6 presents examples of LRA-supported measures that build resilience to climate-related misinformation and disinformation through education, media literacy and participatory engagement. By enabling residents to recognise unreliable information, verify sources, and engage directly with local climate evidence, LRAs can support more informed public debate and strengthen acceptance of EU climate and environmental policies.

Box 6. Best practices implemented by LRAs to build trust with citizens and communities

Illustrative practices and examples

In March 2026, the City Council of Campillos in Andalusia completed the ‘Climate Without Filters’ educational project. The project was implemented with the support of the Local-Global Consortium Association (Coglobal), in collaboration with a local school and a local adult education centre¹⁹⁰. It brought together children aged 10-14 and older residents in **participatory workshops** to strengthen their ability to identify false climate-related news, verify sources, and interpret local climate data on the basis of scientific evidence. Activities included source verification games, headline analysis, and comparisons between local data and official sources. The intergenerational format also helped older residents to develop basic digital skills to recognise false information.

¹⁹⁰ Las 4 Esquinas, ‘Campillos signs the commitment against climate misinformation in a project that unites schoolchildren and adults (*Campillos firma el compromiso contra los bulos climáticos en un proyecto que une a escolares y mayores*)’, 19 March 2026, <https://las4esquinas.com/campillos-firma-el-compromiso-contra-los-bulos-climaticos-en-un-proyecto-que-une-a-escolares-y-mayores/>.

Participants later presented their conclusions and proposals to the City Council during a plenary session at the Town Hall, in the presence of the Mayor and the Councillor for Children and Adolescents. By creating a direct link between climate literacy, citizen voice and municipal decision-making, the initiative helped to strengthen trust in local institutions as responsive and evidence-oriented actors. The programme concluded with the symbolic endorsement by the City Council of the ‘Andalusian Municipalities Free of Climate Misinformation’ pledge, joining a network of five Andalusian municipalities committed to the same objective¹⁹¹.

The Bologna Citizens’ Climate Assembly was convened by the Municipality of Bologna in 2023¹⁹², bringing together 100 randomly selected citizens, broadly representative of the city’s demographic diversity, to formulate proposals on the city’s transition towards climate neutrality. Participants worked on questions relating to energy transition, climate risks such as heatwaves, floods and droughts, and obstacles in municipal rules, services and regulations that could hinder climate action. The process combined information, expert input, deliberation and consensus-building, allowing citizens to engage directly with evidence and with the practical trade-offs involved in local climate policy. Its institutional credibility was reinforced by a **formal follow-up mechanism**: the City Council was required to examine and respond to the recommendations within four months, and subsequently approved the outcomes of the Assembly in February 2024¹⁹³. This makes the practice particularly relevant for trust-building, as it shows how LRAs can move beyond one-way communication and create transparent, participatory processes that involve citizens in shaping climate measures and show how their contributions enter public decision-making.

Transferable lessons for LRAs

These examples show that trust is strengthened when citizens are informed about climate-related disinformation and actively involved in assessing evidence, expressing concerns, and contributing to local climate action. Resilience to disinformation depends on both the accuracy of the information provided and the credibility, openness and responsiveness of the process

¹⁹¹ Almodóvar del Río and Carcabuey in Córdoba, Casares and Campillos in Málaga, and the Northern District of Granada; Coglobal, ‘Climate Without Filter (*Clima sin Filtro*)’, n.d., <https://coglobal.es/proyecto/clima-sin-filtro/>.

¹⁹² Comune di Bologna, ‘Assemblea cittadina per il clima’, n.d., <https://www.bolognamissioneclima.it/il-percorso-dellassemblea-cittadina-per-il-clima-di-bologna/>; Comune di Bologna, ‘Inizia il percorso dell’Assemblea cittadina per il clima’, 3 March 2023, <https://www.comune.bologna.it/novita/notizie/percorso-assemblea-cittadina-clima>.

¹⁹³ Comune di Bologna, ‘Il Consiglio comunale ha approvato la delibera che accoglie le raccomandazioni dell’Assemblea per il Clima’, 26 February 2024, <https://www.comune.bologna.it/novita/comunicati-stampa/il-consiglio-comunale-ha-approvato-la-delibera-che-accoglie-le-raccomandazioni-dellassemblea-il>.

through which it is communicated.

The Campillos example demonstrates the value of **linking media literacy to institutional responsiveness**. Participants were trained to identify false climate-related information, verify sources and interpret local climate data, and were also given the opportunity to present their conclusions and proposals directly to the City Council. The subsequent endorsement of the ‘Andalusian Municipalities Free of Climate Misinformation’ pledge, although symbolic, gave the initiative an institutional follow-up and signaled the municipality’s commitment to evidence-based public debate.

The example also illustrates the importance of **inclusive and intergenerational engagement**. By bringing together children and older residents, the project addressed different forms of vulnerability to misinformation, including limited digital skills among older citizens and the need to build critical information habits from an early age. Such formats can help LRAs to broaden participation, strengthen social cohesion, and reach groups with different concerns, experiences and levels of media literacy.

The Bologna Citizens’ Climate Assembly shows that **participatory climate governance can itself function as a trust-building measure**. Through random selection, expert input, deliberation and formal political follow-up, the Assembly gave citizens a structured role in discussing climate measures and made local climate policy more understandable, transparent and accountable. This is particularly relevant where disinformation feeds on perceptions that EGD measures are imposed from above, technically obscure or disconnected from local realities.

Overall, these practices suggest that LRAs can build resilience to climate-related disinformation by combining practical learning, inclusive dialogue, and visible institutional commitment. Trust is built by providing accurate information and by making climate action participatory, transparent and locally accountable.

Effective communication

Effective communication on climate change and the EGD is essential for LRAs, particularly where public debate is affected by misinformation, disinformation, polarisation or fatigue. Box 7 presents practices that help authorities to translate climate action into clear, accessible and locally relevant messages. LRA communication on climate and environmental measures is most effective when it is grounded in local realities, responds to citizens’ concerns, and reflects the needs and information habits of the target audience. Clear communication can strengthen public understanding, increase acceptance of local measures, and

demonstrate the practical benefits of climate action.

Box 7. Best practices implemented by LRAs to communicate effectively

Illustrative practices and examples

In April 2026, the Polish municipality of Bielsko-Biała took part in the #ClimateFactsMatter campaign¹⁹⁴, a European Commission initiative to counter climate disinformation. As part of the campaign, the municipality produced a video explaining how information manipulation works, raising awareness of climate change and presenting concrete local climate investments.

The video combined scientific explanation, media literacy, and local policy communication. A local expert and science journalist explained the causes and consequences of climate change and provided guidance on how citizens can distinguish reliable information from manipulated or misleading narratives. The video then connected this explanation to measures introduced by the city to strengthen climate resilience. A representative of the local authority, the city gardener, presented EU-funded local investments aimed at improving the city's adaptation to climate change.

This practice linked counter-disinformation efforts with communication on visible local action. Rather than presenting climate policy in abstract terms, the municipality explained both the risks of climate disinformation and the practical measures being implemented locally. This helped to make climate action more tangible for citizens, showing its connection to the local environment, resilience and quality of life.

The initiative also drew on the wider #ClimateFactsMatter communication toolkit¹⁹⁵, which provides accessible messages on climate disinformation and climate action. The campaign is structured around three key messages: citizens should be aware that disinformation exists, be prepared to recognise and counter it using reliable tools and sources, and be informed about climate action.

Transferable lessons for LRAs

The Bielsko-Biała example shows that LRAs can communicate climate action more effectively when they combine evidence-based information, media literacy, and locally visible examples. The practice is easily transferable because it does not require complex tools or highly technical messaging. It relies on clear language, accessible formats, credible messengers and examples that citizens can recognise in their own communities.

¹⁹⁴ Polish Network Energie Cités (PNEC), #ClimateFactsMatter in Bielsko-Biała!, 2026, <https://www.pnec.org.pl/index.php/en/?view=article&id=1125:climatefactsmatter-w-bielsku-bialej&catid=3>.

¹⁹⁵ European Commission, '#ClimateFactsMatter - Countering climate disinformation in the EU', n.d., https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/climate-disinformation/climatefactsmatter-countering-climate-disinformation-eu_en.

A key lesson is the importance of connecting scientific information with concrete local measures. By presenting both the evidence on climate change and the investments taking place in the municipality, the video helped residents to understand why climate action is necessary and how it can improve local resilience and quality of life.

The example highlights the role of trusted and relevant messengers. The combination of a local expert, a science journalist and a municipal representative allowed the issue to be presented from both a factual and practical perspective. This can strengthen credibility, particularly where climate measures are contested or where misleading narratives have created confusion.

Finally, the practice shows that communication on EU-funded climate action can help to make the EGD more meaningful at local level. By linking EU support to concrete municipal investments, LRAs can explain the added value of European climate policy, strengthen the legitimacy of local measures, and contribute to greater public trust in the green transition.

Harnessing the experience of existing initiatives

The Dutch Code of Conduct for Acceptance and Participation in Onshore Wind Energy (the Code)¹⁹⁶ goes beyond individual local practices. Although not an LRA-led initiative in the strictest sense, it provides a transferable governance framework that is directly relevant for LRAs involved in planning and implementing renewable energy projects. By setting out principles on early participation, locally adapted communication, dialogue with residents and stakeholders, and community benefit-sharing (including local ownership), the Code helps to address the social acceptance of onshore wind, a highly sensitive aspect of the green transition. Its added value lies in showing that misinformation and opposition are less likely to escalate where citizens are engaged early, impacts and benefits are communicated transparently, and local communities are given a meaningful role in shaping and benefiting from renewable energy projects.

¹⁹⁶ NWEA et al., ‘Gedragscode Acceptatie & Participatie Windenergie op Land’, Utrecht, October 2020, <https://nedzero.nl/media/pages/footer/c36506083c-1713527577/20201103-gedragscode-wol-opgemaakt-final.pdf>; NedZero, ‘Code of Conduct for Acceptance & Participation for Onshore Wind Energy’, n.d., <https://nedzero.nl/en/about-nedzero/vereniging/code-of-conduct-for-acceptance-participation-for-onshore-wind-energy>.

4. Part 4: A forward-looking approach

This section contrasts the narrative framing and public reception of the Clean Industrial Deal (CID) with that of the EGD, focusing on how each initiative is communicated, understood and contested. The Green Deal is often presented as a comprehensive transformation agenda centred on environmental integrity and societal co-benefits, while the CID is commonly framed in terms of competitiveness, strategic autonomy, and de-risking industrial supply chains. This **difference in emphasis shapes audience perceptions**: industry-facing stakeholders and regions with manufacturing footprints tend to respond more favourably to an industrial narrative that foregrounds jobs, investment, and technology, while parts of the public remain more attuned to fairness, household costs, and local environmental quality – the lenses through which the EGD is typically judged. The analysis examines how messaging alignment (or misalignment) between the two agendas influences trust and uptake, and how a coherent strategic narrative can reconcile climate ambition with economic security and social protection.

The discussion situates this communication challenge within a volatile geopolitical context. International climate negotiations, shifting energy security considerations, and visible divergences in third-country commitments affect public confidence in EU and Member State leadership. If external signals suggest backsliding or uneven ambition, domestic audiences may question the credibility or distributive fairness of EU policy. Accordingly, the section integrates foresight trends and horizon-scanning, looking at technology cost curves, labour market transitions, critical raw materials, and evolving public expectations, to inform a forward-looking narrative that is resilient to shocks and clear about trade-offs, sequencing, and benefits over time.

A further strand assesses how policy rollbacks or simplification exercises can unintentionally fuel disinformation. Abrupt reversals, ambiguous timelines or poorly explained changes create **information vacuums readily filled by misleading claims**. They can also erode the expectation of regulatory predictability that underpins public trust and investment decisions. The analysis underlines the importance of legal certainty, notably transparent rationales, impact explanations and stable implementation pathways, in communicating adjustments to climate and environmental policy. It also looks at particular disinformation campaigns in the United States (US) (e.g. for red meat).

The section highlights EU instruments designed to support citizens through the transition, notably the Social Climate Fund and complementary measures that reduce exposure to energy price volatility, finance household-level investments,

and cushion distributional impacts. Clear communication of eligibility, access and tangible benefits is essential to counter narratives that portray climate policy as a cost without returns.

Finally, the section documents capacity-building initiatives and EU networks that empower both citizens and LRAs, including the Covenant of Mayors, the European Climate Pact and the EU network of local councillors. These platforms amplify credible local voices, facilitate peer learning, and provide ready-to-use tools for engagement. Taken together, the analysis argues for a strategic, evidence-based narrative that bridges industrial competitiveness and climate ambition, explains policy evolution without creating space for distortion, and leverages EU instruments and networks to sustain citizen trust and participation.

4.1 Clean Industrial Deal versus European Green Deal

The European Green Deal was launched in 2019 as a comprehensive transformation agenda for the EU and its citizens. It presented climate neutrality as both an environmental objective and a new growth strategy intended to transform the EU ‘into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy’ with no net greenhouse gases emissions in 2050, and growth decoupled from resource use¹⁹⁷. Its framing was **deliberately broad**, linking climate neutrality with environmental integrity, biodiversity, pollution reduction, public health, social fairness, and quality of life. From the outset, the European Commission stressed that ‘the transition (has to) be just and inclusive’, place people at its centre, and rely on public participation and confidence if policies were to be accepted and implemented effectively¹⁹⁸.

The Clean Industrial Deal¹⁹⁹ was presented in February 2025 and uses a more **targeted industrial framing**. While it confirms the EU’s decarbonisation objective, it focuses on competitiveness, industrial resilience, and the future of European manufacturing. It responds to concerns about high energy costs, global competition, regulatory complexity, slowing demand for clean products, and the risk that clean investments move outside Europe²⁰⁰. Its priorities include energy-intensive industries, clean technology, affordable energy, lead markets for clean products, financing, circularity, access to critical raw materials, trade defence,

¹⁹⁷ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, ‘The European Green Deal’, COM/2019/640 final.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, The Clean Industrial Deal: A joint roadmap for competitiveness and decarbonisation, COM/2025/85 final.

²⁰⁰ European Commission, ‘A Clean Industrial Deal for competitiveness and decarbonisation in the EU’, Press release, 26 February 2025, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/document/print/en/ip_25_550/IP_25_550_EN.pdf.

supply-chain diversification, and skills²⁰¹.

This shift in emphasis reflected the changed geopolitical and economic context in which EU climate policy now operates. Key reference points were the 2024 Draghi Report on the future of European competitiveness²⁰² and the 2025 Competitiveness Compass²⁰³, which framed decarbonisation alongside innovation, competitiveness, and security. Within this framework, the Clean Industrial Deal presents industrial decarbonisation as a condition for maintaining Europe's productive capacity, technological leadership and strategic resilience²⁰⁴. The CID thus makes climate policy more immediately relevant to industrial actors, especially in manufacturing regions, where the transition is primarily evaluated in terms of jobs, investment and production capacity.

This reframing has shaped how the Clean Industrial Deal is received among different stakeholders. Industry stakeholders have generally welcomed narratives that acknowledge energy costs, permitting delays, regulatory complexity, and global competition as structural constraints on the transition, while also calling for more ambitious and faster implementation²⁰⁵. By contrast, environmental citizens' organisations have warned that the CID may narrow the wider European Green Deal vision by shifting attention from a transition for all Europeans towards energy-intensive industries and large corporations²⁰⁶. This concern was also reflected in the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP) 2025 Green Deal Barometer, where sustainability experts expressed only moderate confidence that EU institutions would translate EGD objectives into legislation, with most expecting the EGD agenda to be narrowed or weakened following the launch of the CID²⁰⁷.

The Clean Industrial Deal's **emphasis on regulatory simplification** has generated divergent interpretations: for some, it reduces administrative burden;

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² European Commission, *The future of European competitiveness*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2024, https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/97e481fd-2dc3-412d-be4c-f152a8232961_en?filename=The%20future%20of%20European%20competitiveness%20%20A%20competitiveness%20strategy%20for%20Europe.pdf.

²⁰³ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, A Competitiveness Compass for the EU, COM(2025) 30 final; European Commission, 'Competitiveness Compass', 2025, https://commission.europa.eu/topics/competitiveness/competitiveness-compass_en.

²⁰⁴ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, A Competitiveness Compass for the EU, COM(2025) 30 final, p. 8 et seq.

²⁰⁵ Business Europe, 'Clean Industrial Deal is the right direction, but Commission must "walk the talk"', 26 February 2025, <https://www.bussinesseurope.eu/publications/clean-industrial-deal-is-the-right-direction-but-commission-must-walk-the-talk/>.

²⁰⁶ European Environmental Bureau (EEB), "'The Clean Industrial Deal hides dirty concessions', NGOs say', 26 February 2025, <https://eeb.org/en/clean-industrial-deal/>.

²⁰⁷ Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP), 'European Green Deal Barometer', May 2025, p. 4, <https://ieep.eu/publications/european-green-deal-barometer-2025/>.

for others, it risks diluting climate ambition²⁰⁸. This tension illustrated the communication challenge created by the coexistence of the EGD's broad, inclusive vision and the CID's industrial competitiveness narrative.

The central communication challenge is to clearly explain the relationship between the European Green Deal and the Clean Industrial Deal. The European Green Deal remains the overarching transition framework (the 'why'), while the Clean Industrial Deal can be presented as one of its delivery mechanisms under current geopolitical and economic conditions (the 'how'). It can support climate neutrality by strengthening clean technology production in Europe, reducing dependence on fossil fuel imports and critical external inputs, enabling industrial transformation, and supporting workers and regions affected by the transition²⁰⁹.

Rather than separate agendas, the EGD and the CID should be communicated as **complementary dimensions of a single transition strategy**²¹⁰. A clean industrial economy is environmentally necessary and indeed central to Europe's long-term prosperity, resilience and strategic autonomy²¹¹. Conversely, environmental action should be framed as integral, rather than opposed, to EU competitiveness and economic security²¹².

Public communications should make this relationship explicit. A credible narrative must demonstrate that decarbonisation and competitiveness are not competing objectives, but interdependent conditions for a transition that is both economically viable and socially legitimate. The immediate needs of competitiveness should not overshadow the urgent actions required to address the climate crisis²¹³.

4.2 Developing a strategic narrative in a challenging geopolitical context

The EU's communication challenge on the green transition must be understood as both a **climate policy challenge and a geopolitical challenge**. The Joint Communication on the EU global climate and energy vision (Joint

²⁰⁸ Written response to stakeholder questionnaire: stakeholder active in agriculture-related policy, May 2026.

²⁰⁹ European Climate Foundation, 'Europe's industrial transformation', n.d.,

<https://europeanclimate.org/priority/europes-industrial-transformation/>

²¹⁰ Written response to stakeholder questionnaire: agriculture and rural affairs stakeholder, April 2026: 'A process of balancing environmental, economic, productive and social priorities has begun, which is absolutely necessary'.

²¹¹ European Climate Foundation, *Annual Report 2024 – advancing climate action for peace, democracy and prosperity*, 30 June 2025, pp. 35-37, <https://europeanclimate.org/resources/2024-annual-report/>.

²¹² Written response to stakeholder questionnaire: civil society stakeholder, May 2026.

²¹³ Trans-European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA), 'Clean Industrial Deal: The challenges of aligning industrial ambition, economic growth and climate policy', 22 April 2025, <https://tepsa.eu/analysis/clean-industrial-deal-the-challenges-of-aligning-industrial-ambition-economic-growth-and-climate-policy/>; Written response to stakeholder questionnaire: civil society stakeholder, May 2026.

Communication) presents the clean transition as part of a wider strategy to secure Europe's place in global markets, protect its interests, support fair transition standards internationally, and respond to emerging security threats²¹⁴. The Council Conclusions on EU energy and climate diplomacy similarly frame the transition against a background of geopolitical fragmentation, supply chain vulnerabilities, critical dependencies, and accelerating climate and environmental risks²¹⁵. In this context, the green and clean transition cannot be communicated solely as an environmental obligation. It must also be presented as a strategy for strengthening European sovereignty, preparedness, competitiveness, energy security and resilience, while remaining anchored in the Paris Agreement and the EU's climate commitments²¹⁶.

The international context for climate resilience is characterised by progress, alongside unevenness in ambition and implementation. Countries approach climate negotiations from different priorities, with developing countries often emphasising poverty reduction and economic development, while industrialised countries focus on emissions reductions and support for sustainable development in vulnerable regions²¹⁷. Financial and technological transfer, transparency, accountability, intellectual property, capacity-building and affordability are recurring diplomatic issues²¹⁸. The Council Conclusions highlight the **implementation gap between climate pledges and policies** and call for engagement with all countries, particularly major emitters, in line with their evolving responsibilities, economic roles, and capacity to act²¹⁹. This framing is particularly important because external signals can affect public confidence in EU and Member State leadership. Uneven international ambition, divergent third-country commitments or visible policy backsliding may reinforce perceptions that EU climate action is unfair, economically risky or politically unstable. Recent developments in the US, including the renewed withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and broader climate-policy rollbacks²²⁰, can provide material for

²¹⁴ Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, 'EU Global Climate and Energy Vision: securing Europe's competitive role in world markets and accelerating the clean transition', JOIN/2025/25 final, pp. 2-3; European Committee of the Regions (CoR), 'Draft Opinion, EU global climate and energy vision – Towards more inclusive climate and environment global negotiations' under discussion in early June 2026, <https://www.cor.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions/cdr-4400-2025>.

²¹⁵ Council of the European Union, Council Conclusions on EU energy and climate diplomacy, 21 April 2026, pp. 2-3, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8417-2026-INIT/en/pdf>.

²¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 2, 7.

²¹⁷ Saaideh, M., 'Challenges and opportunities of climate change diplomacy', *Political Science Journal*, Vol. 10, Issue 1, 2023, pp. 1-23, <https://zenodo.org/records/10829085>.

²¹⁸ Ibid., p. 5.

²¹⁹ Council of the Europe Union, Council Conclusions on EU energy and climate diplomacy, 21 April 2026, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8417-2026-INIT/en/pdf>.

²²⁰ The White House, 'Putting America first in international environmental agreements', 20 January 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/putting-america-first-in-international-environmental-agreements/>; Columbia Law School, Sabin Centre for Climate Change Law, 'Climate Backtracker', n.d., <https://climate.law.columbia.edu/content/climate-backtracker>.

narratives suggesting that climate action is not globally shared or that major competitors are stepping away from climate commitments. EU communication should explain why climate action remains necessary and how it strengthens resilience, reduces exposure to fossil-fuel volatility, and supports long-term competitiveness.

A credible forward-looking narrative should avoid presenting climate ambition as a uniform obligation imposed on all actors in the same way. Instead, it should **recognise differentiated responsibilities and capacities**, while explaining how EU action, climate finance, technology cooperation, and capacity-building can support a fairer international transition. Concerns about reciprocity²²¹, competitiveness and international standards may be legitimate and should not automatically be treated as misinformation²²². Rather, they should be addressed directly, with evidence and clear explanations of how EU policy seeks to manage competitive risks.

Energy security should sit at the core of the narrative. In the current geopolitical context, marked by Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine, escalating tensions in the Middle East and renewed energy price volatility, the clean transition should be presented as part of Europe's response to insecurity, dependency and exposure to external shocks. The CoR Bureau Declaration on AccelerateEU underlines that dependence on imported fossil fuel energy and external suppliers creates structural vulnerabilities, while decarbonisation, electrification, renewable energy, energy efficiency and low-carbon technologies are strategic choices for the Union's security, resilience, competitiveness and cohesion²²³. The transition should be framed accordingly as a response to security concerns. At the same time, the narrative must remain candid about trade-offs: for example, during the transition, diversified fossil fuel imports and secure, rules-based markets remain necessary²²⁴. Communication should thus avoid both triumphalism and defensiveness. While climate neutrality remains the objective, its achievement depends on sequencing, affordability, and sustained public support.

Recent studies indicate that anti-wind actors are systematically circulating recurring claims about the alleged health, environmental and economic harms of wind energy, with tangible effects on project delivery, investment certainty and

²²¹ Written response to stakeholder questionnaire: agriculture and rural affairs stakeholder, April 2026.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ European Committee of the Regions (CoR), 'Declaration of the Bureau of the European Committee of the Regions on AccelerateEU – Energy Union Affordable and Secure Energy through Accelerated Action', 4 May 2026, points 1 and 7, <https://www.cor.europa.eu/en/news/energy-crisis-local-and-regional-leaders-urge-action-boost-long-term-resilience> .

²²⁴ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

political decision-making²²⁵. These narratives can function as a ‘shadow permitting system’, generating local opposition that translates into appeals, delays and political pressure, particularly where municipalities can block wind development²²⁶. For LRAs, this means that communication on energy security must go beyond general messaging and **address place-specific claims directly**, while clearly explaining the local benefits and safeguards of renewable energy projects.

Anti-renewable campaigns should be understood within broader geopolitical and transatlantic information dynamics. Currently, the EU has accelerated electrification and renewable deployment in response to fossil fuel shocks and vulnerabilities in energy supply²²⁷. In that context, renewables may themselves become targets of disinformation precisely because they are central to reducing dependence on imported fossil fuels and strengthening European energy sovereignty²²⁸. Anti-wind narratives developed in other political contexts have been echoed by some European political actors, contributing to regulatory uncertainty and investment risk²²⁹. This points to a clear but cautious communication approach: **renewable deployment and electrification should be framed as both decarbonisation measures and as components of European energy sovereignty and democratic resilience**, while avoiding claims that cannot be substantiated.

More generally, a forward-looking narrative should draw on horizon-scanning evidence. The Joint Communication material shows that the clean transition is already reshaping global markets: clean energy investment now exceeds fossil fuel investment globally; renewable electricity generation and clean technology markets are expanding; and the costs of key renewable technologies have fallen significantly over the past decade²³⁰. These trends allow the transition to be communicated as a **structural economic shift** in which Europe must remain competitive. The same applies to labour markets: the growth of clean technology employment should be used to explain that the transition is also about shaping where future industrial activity, skills and quality jobs will be located²³¹. Critical raw materials require an equally balanced narrative. The EU aims to reduce high-risk dependencies, strengthen supply chains, and secure access to key

²²⁵ WindEurope and CASM Technology, ‘Wind Energy Dis- and Misinformation’, 21 April 2026, pp. 2, 10, 23-24.

²²⁶ Giordano, E., ‘Trump-style war on windmills spreads across Europe’, *Politico*, 11 May 2026, <https://www.politico.eu/article/trump-style-anti-windmill-crusade-surges-in-europe/>.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ WindEurope and CASM Technology, ‘Wind Energy Dis- and Misinformation’, 21 April 2026, p. 14.

²²⁹ Ibid., p. 24.

²³⁰ Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, ‘EU Global Climate and Energy Vision: securing Europe’s competitive role in world markets and accelerating the clean transition’, JOIN/2025/25 final, p. 3.

²³¹ Ibid.

technologies through diversification, circularity and strategic projects, including initiatives outside the EU²³². At the same time, communication should make clear that supply security must be pursued consistently with international law, human rights, and sustainability standards²³³. This helps to avoid replacing one dependency narrative with another, and supports a more credible account of strategic autonomy.

Public expectations should be treated as an input into policy design and communication. A 2025 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report emphasises that **citizens are central to the net-zero transition** as voters, policy users, households, workers and members of society, and that their actions and behavioural choices are essential for policy implementation and emissions reductions²³⁴. It also notes that only 30% of respondents feel that their political system gives them a voice, only 39% think communication around reforms explains how changes would affect them, only 40% feel that government decisions are based on the best available evidence and data, and only 37% are confident that government balances the interests of current and future generations²³⁵. These findings support a narrative that is transparent, participatory and evidence-backed, with clear explanations of who is affected, when benefits are expected, and how fairness concerns are addressed. The same report identifies the key elements of an effective government-citizen interface: transparent information and open data, clear and responsive communication, people-centred policy-making and behavioural insights. This is particularly relevant for LRAs, which are closest to citizens' lived experience of energy costs, transport, housing, employment change, and climate impacts. A strategic narrative must be adaptable across governance levels, allowing European objectives to be translated into locally meaningful benefits, costs and trade-offs.

Overall, the strategic narrative should present the green transition as a **long-term resilience strategy** in a volatile geopolitical environment: it protects the EU from fossil fuel exposure, supports competitiveness in growing clean technology markets, responds to climate risks, and preserves the EU's credibility as a predictable international partner. However, this narrative will only be credible if it is candid about sequencing, costs, dependencies, distributional effects, and

²³² Council of the European Union, Council Conclusions on EU energy and climate diplomacy, 21 April 2026, p. 4, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8417-2026-INIT/en/pdf>; Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, EU Global Climate and Energy Vision: securing Europe's competitive role in world markets and accelerating the clean transition, JOIN/2025/25 final, p. 6.

²³³ Council of the European Union, Council Conclusions on EU energy and climate diplomacy, 21 April 2026, p. 15, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8417-2026-INIT/en/pdf>.

²³⁴ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 'Engaging and empowering citizens for the net-zero transition', 11 April 2025, pp. 7-8, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/engaging-and-empowering-citizens-for-the-net-zero-transition_8d869640-en.html.

²³⁵ Ibid., p. 9.

uncertainty. It should therefore combine ambition with realism, explaining why action remains necessary despite uneven international ambition, how trade-offs will be managed over time, and how citizens and territories will be meaningfully involved in shaping the transition.

4.3 Monitoring policy rollbacks and simplification exercises

Policy simplification is not in itself a rollback. It can be a legitimate instrument of better regulation that removes unnecessary complexity, improves implementation, and makes obligations clearer for public authorities, businesses and citizens. The European Commission's current simplification agenda is expressly framed as a way to **strengthen competitiveness** while maintaining economic, social and environmental objectives, including targets to reduce administrative burdens by at least 25% for businesses and 35% for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)²³⁶. However, simplification is never solely technical. It involves political choices about which rules are changed, why they are changed, and how continuity with existing policy objectives is preserved²³⁷.

This is particularly important in the context of the green transition, where the issue is whether adjustments to climate and environmental legislation are legally certain, evidence-based, transparent, and predictable²³⁸. The European Commission's Better Regulation framework stresses that EU policy-making should be informed by evidence, stakeholder consultation, impact assessment, transparency, implementation dialogue, and evaluation across the policy cycle²³⁹. In climate and environmental policy, these principles are also communication safeguards. **Clear and foreseeable rules** support public trust, investment decisions, and long-term transition planning; by contrast, uncertainty can delay investment, weaken compliance and create space for misleading interpretations.

Abrupt policy reversals, repeated postponements, unclear transitional arrangements or poorly explained reforms can create **information gaps**. Stakeholders suggest that shifts in political discourse and policy direction make it increasingly difficult to communicate a consistent message on the European Green Deal. Initially presented as a stable and coherent framework, the EGD has

²³⁶ European Commission, 'Simplification', n.d., https://commission.europa.eu/law/law-making-process/better-regulation/simplification-implementation-enforcement/simplification_en; European Commission, 'REFIT – making EU law simpler, more efficient and future-proof', n.d., https://commission.europa.eu/law/law-making-process/evaluating-and-improving-existing-laws/refit-making-eu-law-simpler-more-efficient-and-future-proof_en.

²³⁷ BirdLife Europe, European Environmental Bureau (EEB), CAN Europe, Transport & Environment, and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) EU, 'EU simplification explained – FAQ', September 2025, <https://www.transportenvironment.org/articles/eu-simplification-explained>.

²³⁸ Ibid.: 'Done well, simplification can still help (...) But it must be evidence-based, involve stakeholders, and never weaken the law's ambition, enforceability, or purpose'.

²³⁹ European Commission, 'Better Regulation', n.d., https://commission.europa.eu/law/law-making-process/better-regulation_en.

subsequently been affected by political reframing, renaming, and reformulation of policy packages, creating some confusion about what has changed and what remains in place. Where not clearly explained, policy evolution may be misrepresented as evidence that climate policy is failing, being abandoned or being weakened without public scrutiny²⁴⁰. This is particularly problematic because lack of trust in public authorities can make citizens more receptive to misinformation²⁴¹.

The Omnibus I simplification package illustrates both the legitimate rationale and the communication risks of simplification in EU climate governance. The European Commission presented the package as a way to reduce compliance complexity, focus obligations on the largest companies, and make sustainability reporting more efficient²⁴². The package covers corporate sustainability reporting, sustainability due diligence, the EU Taxonomy, Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) and EU investment programmes, among others. The Council of the EU's final approval in February 2026²⁴³ simplified sustainability reporting and due diligence requirements by reducing reporting burdens and limiting the trickle-down effect of obligations on smaller companies²⁴⁴. However, because these changes affect recently adopted green policies instruments, they also carry significant communication risks. If technical terminology such as 'simplification' is perceived as masking political rollback, it can erode trust and make it harder for citizens and stakeholders to distinguish genuine efforts to improve implementation from attempts to weaken protections²⁴⁵. This risk is amplified by the nature of contemporary climate disinformation, which often **targets the credibility and feasibility of climate policy** rather than denying climate change itself²⁴⁶. As a result, policy uncertainty or ambiguous communication can be exploited to suggest that climate action is 'bad' or failing, making clear and consistent messaging essential.

The US provides a useful example of how information gaps around climate policy

²⁴⁰ Stakeholder interview: climate and environmental policy stakeholder, April 2026; Written response to stakeholder questionnaire: civil society stakeholder, May 2026.

²⁴¹ Stakeholder interview: climate and environmental policy stakeholder, April 2026.

²⁴² European Commission, 'Omnibus Package', 1 April 2025, https://finance.ec.europa.eu/news/omnibus-package-2025-04-01_en.

²⁴³ Council of the EU, 'Council signs off simplification of sustainability reporting and due diligence requirements to boost EU competitiveness', Press release, 24 February 2026, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/02/24/council-signs-off-simplification-of-sustainability-reporting-and-due-diligence-requirements-to-boost-eu-competitiveness/>.

²⁴⁴ Thomadakis, A., 'The EU's sustainability rollback is a retreat disguised as simplification', *ECMI Commentary No 96*, 2026, [no 96 - the eus sustainability rollback is a retreat disguised as simplification 0.pdf](https://www.ecmi.europa.eu/publications/commentary/no-96-the-eus-sustainability-rollback-is-a-retreat-disguised-as-simplification-0.pdf); Todeschini, S., 'The great EU reversal: fast-track deregulation and the erosion of Europe's sustainability ambition with the Omnibus I Regulation', 27 October 2025, <https://www.europeanlawblog.eu/pub/pqhw0y8j/release/1>.

²⁴⁵ European Committee of the Regions (CoR), 'Opinion – Simplification of administrative burdens in environmental legislation', CDR-0953-2026, <https://www.cor.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions/cdr-0953-2026>.

²⁴⁶ See part 1 of this study.

can be exploited. In 2021, misleading claims circulated that President Biden’s climate agenda would require Americans to drastically reduce their consumption of red meat, including claims that they would be limited to around four pounds of red meat per year. Fact-checking organisations found that no such measure had been proposed. The claim linked Biden’s climate target – to reduce US greenhouse gas emissions by 50% to 52% from 2005 levels by 2030 – to an unrelated 2020 academic study on meat consumption²⁴⁷, despite the fact that Biden’s stated plans did not mention any reduction in meat consumption. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack subsequently denied that the the White House or the US Department of Agriculture intended to limit beef consumption, noting that political actors may inject issues into public debate even in the absence of a factual basis²⁴⁸. The example illustrates how climate and environmental policies can be misrepresented when broad climate objectives are reframed as specific lifestyle restrictions that were never proposed. Clear communication about what a policy does and does not require is essential.

Monitoring policy rollbacks and simplification exercises should form part of a wider public engagement and information integrity strategy for the green transition²⁴⁹. **Changes should be clearly explained**, including their legal basis, environmental and social impacts, timelines, and transitional measures, with accessible communication for citizens, businesses, and authorities. The European Commission’s Better Regulation tools (public consultation, feedback on draft legal acts, implementation dialogue, stakeholder reality checks) provide a strong foundation if effectively applied²⁵⁰. Stakeholder evidence also points to the importance of **embedding thorough assessment and structured dialogue early** in the policy process, bringing together institutions, farmers, scientists, industry, and civil society. This can help to identify trade-offs and unintended consequences before positions become polarised. Clear communication of objectives and implementation pathways also prevents unrealistic expectations²⁵¹. Legal certainty and information integrity are mutually reinforcing: transparent

²⁴⁷ The authors of the study clarified that the study identified possible emissions reduction opportunities and did not recommend mandatory dietary changes (Keoleian, G. and Heller, M., ‘Facts about Centre for Sustainable Systems diet study report and misinformation linking to Biden Climate Plan’, University of Michigan, 26 April 2021, <https://seas.umich.edu/news/facts-about-center-sustainable-systems-diet-study-report-and-misinformation-linking-biden>).

²⁴⁸ Farley, R., ‘Artificial beef about Biden’s Climate Plan’, *Factcheck.org*, 27 April 2021, <https://www.factcheck.org/2021/04/artificial-beef-about-bidens-climate-plan/>; McCarthy, B., ‘Joe Biden banning burgers? Fox News, GOP politicians fuel false narrative’, *Politifact*, 26 April 2021, <https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2021/apr/26/fox-news-channel/joe-biden-banning-burgers-fox-news-gop-politicians/>; For a wider overview on red meat disinformation: Changing Market Foundation, ‘The new merchants of doubt: how big meat and dairy avoid climate action’, July 2024, <https://changingmarkets.org/report/the-new-merchants-of-doubt-how-big-meat-and-dairy-avoid-climate-action/>.

²⁴⁹ International Panel on the Information Environment (IPIE), ‘Information integrity about climate science: a systematic review’, Synthesis report SR2025.1, 2025, <http://doi.org/10.61452/BTZP3426>.

²⁵⁰ European Commission, ‘Better Regulation’, n.d., https://commission.europa.eu/law/law-making-process/better-regulation_en.

²⁵¹ Written response to stakeholder questionnaire: stakeholder active in agriculture-related policy, May 2026.

simplification can build trust by clarifying trade-offs, while unclear or inconsistent changes risk undermining confidence and enabling disinformation. A stable, transparent policy framework is essential to maintain public trust and a credible green transition narrative.

4.4 EU instruments and initiatives supporting citizen transitions

The green transition depends on both regulatory ambition and citizens' ability to identify, access and understand the supports available to them. While most citizens are not inherently opposed to climate policy, public support depends on whether the costs and benefits of the transition are perceived as **fair, manageable, and evenly distributed**²⁵². EU climate policy is accompanied by financial, technical, and communication tools that aim to reduce distributional impacts, support household investment, strengthen local resilience, and improve public understanding of climate action. From a disinformation perspective, this is crucial. Clear and early communication on eligibility, access, and tangible benefits can help to counter such narratives by demonstrating how EU instruments support people and territories in practice, particularly the vulnerable groups and communities most exposed to transition costs²⁵³. Stakeholder evidence underlines the importance of communicating available support before economic or social pressure is felt most acutely. Where legitimate concerns around rising living costs or access to basic goods already create anxiety, climate measures may be more easily perceived as an additional burden, creating fertile ground for simplified or distorted messages²⁵⁴.

The **Social Climate Fund** (the Fund) is one of the most direct EU-level instruments for cushioning the social effects of the green transition. It is designed to support vulnerable households, transport users and micro-enterprises most affected by the new carbon pricing framework for buildings, road transport and small industries as Europe moves towards climate neutrality. Running from 2026 to 2032, the Fund is expected to mobilise EUR 86.7 billion, financed through the new emissions trading system and mandatory Member State contributions. It can finance investments for greener homes, including building renovation, insulation, cleaner heating and cooling systems and renewable energy installations, as well as greener transport and temporary direct income support for those most in need²⁵⁵.

²⁵² Jüngling, E., Sgaravatti, G., Tagliapietra, S. and Zachmann, G., 'Making the best of the new EU Social Climate Fund', Bruegel Policy Brief, No. 14/2025, p. 11, <https://www.econstor.eu/handle/10419/322595>.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Written response to stakeholder questionnaire: agriculture and rural affairs stakeholder, April 2026.

²⁵⁵ European Commission, 'Social Climate Fund', n.d., https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/funding/social-climate-fund_en.

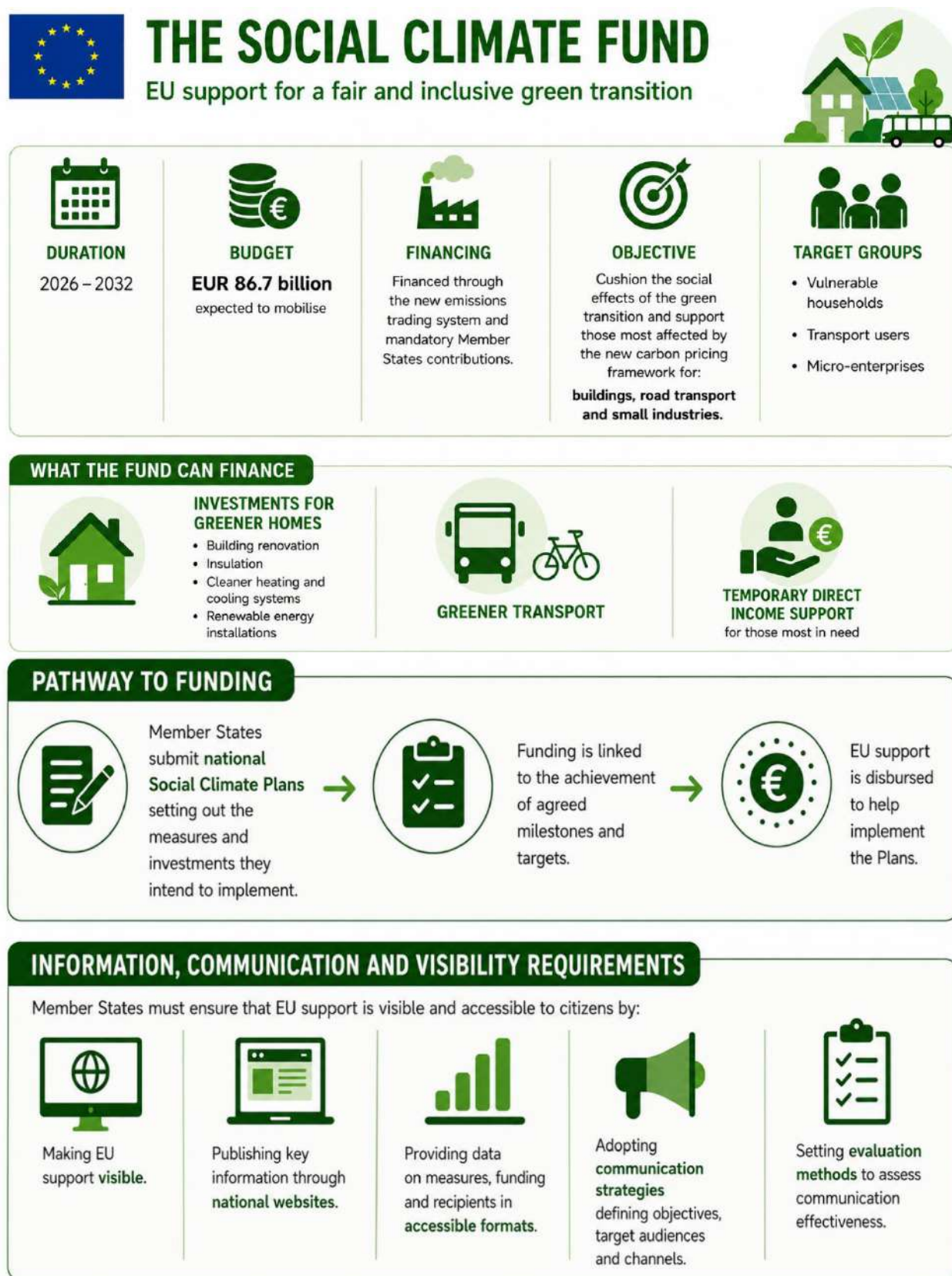
To receive funding, Member States must submit **national social climate plans** setting out the measures and investments they intend to implement. Funding is then linked to the achievement of agreed milestones and targets. The European Commission has issued guidance²⁵⁶ to support Member States to design and implement these plans, paying particular attention to ensuring that support reaches those most affected by energy and transport poverty and **contributes to social fairness**. This guidance is relevant from a funding perspective, as well as from a communication and trust-building perspective. Its chapter on information, communication and visibility requires Member States to make EU support visible, publish key information through national websites, provide data on measures, funding and recipients in accessible formats, and adopt communication strategies defining objectives, target audiences, channels and evaluation methods²⁵⁷.

These requirements are essential to counter disinformation. The Fund can only counter narratives portraying climate policy as a one-sided burden if citizens understand who is eligible, the support available, how it can be accessed, and its concrete benefits. Clear, timely and accessible communication on the Social Climate Fund can help to demonstrate that the EU's climate transition includes social protection mechanisms, targeted support for vulnerable groups, and practical investments in homes, mobility and resilience. In this sense, the Fund is also a key test of whether EU climate policy can be communicated as fair, tangible, and responsive to citizens' needs.

²⁵⁶ European Commission, Notice – Guidance on the Implementation of the Social Climate Fund, C(2025) 6732 final; Earlier, the European Commission compiled a set of good practices for cost-effective measures and investments that EU countries could use as a reference when selecting appropriate measures: European Commission: Directorate-General for Climate Action, Ramboll Management Consulting and Wuppertal Institute for Climate Environment and Energy, 'Support for the implementation of the Social Climate Fund – Note on good practices for cost-effective measures and investments', 2024, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2834/602067>.

²⁵⁷ European Commission, Notice – Guidance on the Implementation of the Social Climate Fund, C(2025) 6732 final, pp. 37-41.

Figure 8. The Social Climate Fund in a nutshell



Source: Authors' elaboration

Beyond financial support, EU engagement tools are relevant to citizens' transition experience. A key example is the **European Climate Pact** (the Pact), a European Commission initiative under the European Green Deal that encourages citizens to take action toward a cleaner and more resilient Europe²⁵⁸. The Pact can support both citizen engagement and local capacity-building by providing accessible learning resources, practical guidance and opportunities for participation (see section 4.5). Its wider toolbox includes the **EU Climate Action Academy**²⁵⁹, a free online learning platform offering recorded online events, workshops and interactive content for citizens, educators, organisations, local and national authorities, young people and members of the Pact community. It covers topics such as citizen engagement, climate communication, community mobilisation, just transition, and countering disinformation. Recent resources and webinars included sessions on climate disinformation, social media and practical approaches to identifying misleading narratives, showcasing its relevance as a communication and resilience-building tool for the green transition²⁶⁰.

The **EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change** (the Mission) is another important resource supporting citizens and territories facing the concrete impacts of climate change. The Mission aims to support at least 150 European regions and communities towards climate resilience by 2030, helping them to understand climate risks, develop adaptation pathways, and implement innovative solutions²⁶¹. There are funding opportunities for the Mission under the Horizon Europe 2026-2027 Work Programme. It also provides tools to enhance stakeholder and citizen engagement²⁶².

Ultimately, the success of EU climate policy depends in part on how people experience and understand it in their daily lives. Initiatives like the Social Climate Fund, the European Climate Pact and the Mission on Adaptation show that the transition comes with support and opportunities to get involved. If known and communicated clearly, these instruments can help to show that EU climate and environmental policy is a framework of practical support, local engagement and shared resilience, as well as a regulatory agenda. Citizen participation is critical in this context, as climate policies will increasingly have material impacts on the

²⁵⁸ European Union (EU), 'European Climate Pact', n.d., https://climate-pact.europa.eu/index_en.

²⁵⁹ European Climate Pact, 'EU Climate Action Academy', n.d., https://climate-pact.europa.eu/eu-climate-action-academy_en.

²⁶⁰ European Climate Pact, 'Navigating climate disinformation and the role of social media', 2026, https://climate-pact.europa.eu/articles-and-events/events/navigating-climate-disinformation-and-role-social-media-2026-05-19_en; European Climate Pact, 'Deep dive disentangling climate misinformation: a practical approach', 2026, https://climate-pact.europa.eu/articles-and-events/events/deep-dive-disentangling-climate-misinformation-practical-approach-2026-06-16_en.

²⁶¹ European Commission, 'EU Mission: Adaptation to Climate Change', n.d., https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/eu-missions-horizon-europe/adaptation-climate-change_en.

²⁶² European Commission, 'Stakeholder & citizen engagement', n.d., https://mission-adaptation-portal.ec.europa.eu/knowledge-hub/stakeholder-citizen-engagement_en.

lives of everyday people. Participation can, in turn, increase the public legitimacy and acceptance of the climate policy²⁶³.

4.5 Capacity-building and EU networks

Capacity-building initiatives and EU networks are central to sustaining public engagement in the green transition because they help to translate EU-level climate objectives into locally meaningful action. This is particularly important given the role of local and regional authorities as intermediaries between EU policy and citizens' everyday concerns. When trust in LRAs is comparatively strong, they can help to make climate policy more understandable, responsive and credible at territorial level²⁶⁴. OECD research confirms that trust in public institutions strengthens participation, compliance, and reform implementation, and depends on transparency, responsiveness, and meaningful public engagement²⁶⁵. Stakeholders underline that participatory processes must be **genuinely inclusive and impactful** rather than perceived as tick-box exercises, as superficial engagement risks eroding trust by reinforcing the perception that decisions have already been made²⁶⁶.

The **Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy** is one of the most established EU-supported platforms for this purpose. The largest movement of local governments in Europe acting on climate change, it gathers over 10,500 local authorities voluntarily committed to EU energy and climate targets²⁶⁷. Its added value lies both in political commitment and in practical implementation support that provides guidance, amplifies local voices, encourages collaboration, and improves access to resources and support²⁶⁸. Signatories commit to climate neutrality by 2050, with interim targets, community engagement and action on resilience and energy poverty. They are supported by a shared methodology, guidance, monitoring tools, helpdesk services, networking opportunities, and multilevel cooperation²⁶⁹. The Covenant of Mayors also provides a dedicated

²⁶³ Accogli, A. et al., 'Improving public participation for climate action and resilient democracy in the European Union', Policy brief, 2025, <https://www.greendeanet.eu/Improving-public-participation>; European Environmental Bureau (EEB), 'Public participation and Social Climate Plans: the need for ongoing citizen engagement', 5 August 2025, <https://eeb.org/en/library/public-participation-and-social-climate-plans-the-need-for-ongoing-citizen-engagement/>.

²⁶⁴ Joint Research Centre (JRC), 'Where we live changes our trust in institutions', 2 December 2025, https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/where-we-live-changes-our-trust-institutions-2025-12-02_en; Stakeholder interview: climate and environmental policy stakeholder, April 2026.

²⁶⁵ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 'Trust in Government', n.d., <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/trust-in-government.html>.

²⁶⁶ Stakeholder interview: climate and environmental policy stakeholder, April 2026.

²⁶⁷ European Commission, 'EU Covenant of Mayors', n.d., <https://eu-mayors.ec.europa.eu/en/home>.

²⁶⁸ European Commission, 'EU Covenant of Mayors – What we do', n.d., <https://eu-mayors.ec.europa.eu/en/What-we-do>.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

webpage on climate disinformation²⁷⁰, bringing together key resources such as the Global Covenant of Mayors (GCoM) Guidebook on Addressing Rampant Climate Disinformation²⁷¹, the 5 Things You Should Know About series²⁷², the How to talk to people about climate action” toolkit²⁷³, and the main climate disinformation page managed by the European Commission²⁷⁴. Accessible and easy to navigate, it equips LRAs with concrete tools to better understand, address, and counter climate disinformation.

The **European Climate Pact** plays an important capacity-building role by mobilising citizens, communities and organisations around climate action. It is presented as a ‘movement of people each taking action to help build a cleaner and more resilient Europe’ and to support the EU objective of climate neutrality by 2050. The ‘Get involved’ resources provide practical entry points for citizens and LRAs, including the Climate Pact Going Local Talks and the Pact Ambassadors initiative²⁷⁵. The Climate Pact Going Local Talks²⁷⁶, organised with the Committee of the Regions, bring communities, local authorities and CoR Climate Pact Ambassadors together to discuss how climate policy can translate into action on the ground, how adaptation and resilience can be strengthened, and how the social and economic dimensions of the transition can be addressed. Pact Ambassadors²⁷⁷, in turn, commit to informing, inspiring and supporting climate policy and action in their communities and networks, while receiving access to training, tools and capacity-building resources. These formats are relevant because they support dialogue rather than one-way communication. They can help citizens to understand how climate neutrality relates to everyday life, while allowing local concerns to be raised in more constructive settings. Stakeholder evidence suggests that face-to-face engagement can be particularly effective in addressing misleading narratives, as in-person dialogue tends to be more accountable and less hostile than online exchanges²⁷⁸.

²⁷⁰ European Commission, ‘EU Covenant of Mayors – Building trust in the face of climate disinformation’, n.d., <https://eu-mayors.ec.europa.eu/en/news/building-trust-face-climate-disinformation>.

²⁷¹ Global Covenant of Mayors, ‘Addressing rampant climate disinformation’, 29 October 2024, <https://www.globalcovenantofmayors.org/press/addressing-rampant-climate-disinformation/>.

²⁷² European Commission, ‘5 things you should know’, n.d., https://climate.ec.europa.eu/news-other-reads/5-things-you-should-know_en

²⁷³ European Climate Pact, ‘How to talk to people about climate action’, 2022, <https://climate-pact.europa.eu/system/files/2022-11/How%20to%20talk%20to%20people%20about%20climate%20action%20toolkit.pdf>.

²⁷⁴ European Commission, ‘Climate disinformation’, n.d., https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/climate-disinformation_en#protect-yourself-from-climate-disinformation.

²⁷⁵ European Climate Pact, ‘Get involved’, n.d., https://climate-pact.europa.eu/get-involved_en.

²⁷⁶ European Climate Pact, ‘Climate Pact Going Local Talks’, n.d., https://climate-pact.europa.eu/get-involved/climate-pact-going-local-talks_en.

²⁷⁷ European Climate Pact, ‘Become a Pact Ambassador’, n.d., https://climate-pact.europa.eu/get-involved/become-pact-ambassador_en.

²⁷⁸ Stakeholder interview: climate and environmental policy stakeholder, April 2026.

The **EU Local Councillors Network**²⁷⁹ strengthens the link between EU policy and local democratic debate. Run jointly by the European Commission and the European Committee of the Regions, it brings together more than 3,000 local and regional elected representatives from all EU Member States. Its purpose is to support local and regional representatives to communicate the work of the EU to citizens, encouraging them to engage in the European project and exchange experience with peers. Members receive access to dedicated services and communication products, networking opportunities, and knowledge-sharing tools to support their engagement with constituents on EU-related issues²⁸⁰.

The CoR's **Green Deal Going Local** initiative²⁸¹ provides a political and communication framework that places cities and regions at the centre of European Green Deal implementation. By promoting exchange, visibility, and engagement among local and regional authorities, it helps to translate EU climate objectives into locally meaningful narratives and supports communication efforts capable of addressing public concerns, including misinformation around the green transition.

The **European Federation of Energy Agencies and Regions (FEDARENE)** can play a similar enabling role as a platform enabling territorial energy actors to share expertise, develop policy positions, and support the implementation of climate and energy measures. Its relevance lies in its capacity to connect LRAs with technical knowledge, peer learning and community-based approaches, including citizen energy and renewable energy acceptance. Such networks can help to ensure that evidence-based information on the energy transition is accessible, locally grounded, and consistent across territories, thereby supporting public trust and reducing the space for misleading narratives to take root.

Finally, EU-level communication and disinformation materials should be integrated into the mapping of instruments empowering citizens and local and regional authorities. The **European Commission's #ClimateFactsMatter campaign** aims to strengthen societal resilience against climate-related disinformation and manipulation by sharing information on how to identify misleading techniques and helping citizens to take part in informed public debates (see Section 2; Section 3, Box 4).

Taken together, these initiatives show that capacity-building is not a secondary element of the green transition, but, rather, a condition for its democratic legitimacy and practical implementation. By equipping LRAs with guidance, communication materials, peer-learning opportunities and engagement formats,

²⁷⁹ EU Local Councillors Network, Website, n.d., https://eu-local-councillors.europa.eu/index_en.

²⁸⁰ EU Local Councillors Network, 'What we offer', n.d., https://eu-local-councillors.europa.eu/what-we-offer_en.

²⁸¹ European Committee of the Regions (CoR), 'Commission for the Environment, Climate Change and Energy (ENVE)', n.d., <https://www.cor.europa.eu/en/our-work/commissions/enve>.

EU networks can help to translate climate objectives into local realities, counter misleading narratives, and strengthen citizen participation. However, their effectiveness depends on whether these tools are visible, accessible, and actively used by local and regional authorities in ways that respond to citizens' concrete concerns.

5. Part 5: Conclusions and policy recommendations

The study shows that misinformation and disinformation gain traction where climate policy is complex, distant, poorly explained or perceived as inconsistent. They are also more likely to resonate when citizens feel that costs, trade-offs or legitimate concerns are not recognised. The response cannot therefore be limited to faster rebuttal, but must combine clear information, legal certainty, participation, trusted messengers, and practical support. **For LRAs, the central lesson is to turn proximity into trust.** Their strength lies in understanding local concerns, convening credible intermediaries, and translating climate objectives into tangible effects on homes, mobility, jobs, health, neighbourhood quality, and resilience. Their communication will be most effective where it is early, participatory, evidence-based, and visibly responsive. **For EU and national policymakers, the central lesson is coherence:** climate ambition, industrial competitiveness and social fairness must be communicated as mutually reinforcing objectives. When policies evolve, institutions must explain why, what changes, what remains in place, and how long-term objectives will be delivered. This is essential to avoid information vacuums that misleading narratives can exploit. For the **wider stakeholder ecosystem, the central lesson is responsibility.** Civil society, scientific actors, local media, educators, fact-checkers, sectoral organisations and EU-supported networks all shape how the green transition is understood. Public engagement is not an accessory to climate policy, but, rather, a core condition for its credibility, legitimacy, and implementation.

The sections below set out practical recommendations for strengthening communication, engagement and resilience to climate- and environment-related misinformation and disinformation in the green transition. The recommendations are addressed primarily to LRAs and to EU and national policymakers, as well as to relevant stakeholder groups. This reflects the study's finding that countering misinformation and disinformation requires a multi-stakeholder approach that combines institutional clarity with trusted local and sectoral voices.

5.1 Recommendations for LRAs

1. Start communication from audience insight

Vulnerability to misinformation is not uniform. **It is shaped by age, settlement type, digital and media literacy, economic exposure and proximity to policy impacts.** Rural communities, older residents, young people exposed to social media, households facing energy poverty, farmers and other affected groups may encounter different narratives and rely on different trusted messengers. LRAs should begin communication planning by mapping local concerns, values,

information habits and trusted intermediaries. This should include identifying the groups most exposed to misleading narratives, legitimate concerns that need to be addressed, and the local actors best placed to communicate credibly. Communication should be audience-specific from the outset, rather than adapted only after resistance has emerged.

2. Translate technical climate measures into concrete local meaning

Complexity is a major barrier to effective communication. Climate and environmental policies are often communicated through technical language, long timelines and abstract targets, even though citizens need to understand how measures affect household costs, mobility, jobs, local services, health, housing, and neighbourhood quality. Where institutions do not provide clear explanations, informal or misleading interpretations can fill the gap. **LRAs should translate climate measures into plain, practical and locally relevant messages.** Each communication should explain what the measure changes, what it does not change, who is affected, what support is available and what benefits can be expected. Local examples, simple visuals, Q&A sessions and concrete scenarios should be used to connect EU and national objectives to citizens' daily lives.

3. Communicate early and pre-empt likely misconceptions

Delayed or reactive communication can leave an interpretive vacuum in which misleading claims spread before institutional explanations reach the public. This is particularly problematic where measures concern land use, mobility, energy costs, farming, housing or local livelihoods, as these are areas where concerns can quickly become emotionally and politically charged. **LRAs should communicate before controversy escalates.** They should anticipate likely misunderstandings, publish clear 'what this means/does not mean' explanations, and use pre-bunking techniques to prepare citizens to recognise misleading narratives. Rapid myth-busting remains useful, but should not replace early, practical and preventive communication.

4. Build trust through participation as well as information

Trust is strengthened where citizens are treated as recipients of information and are given meaningful opportunities to question, deliberate and contribute. The best practice examples show that media literacy, citizens' assemblies, public presentations and institutional follow-up can help to connect evidence, citizen voice, and municipal decision-making. LRAs should create **two-way engagement formats**, including listening sessions, citizen panels, intergenerational workshops, climate assemblies and local dialogue. These processes can include visible follow-up, where citizens are able to see how their questions, concerns and proposals are considered. Participation should not be a tick-box exercise, as superficial consultation may reinforce mistrust and the perception that decisions have already been taken.

5. Strengthen local information resilience and make available support visible

Local media, media literacy and accessible information on support measures are all essential to counter narratives portraying climate policy as confusing, imposed or burdensome. Local media can provide trusted context on EU and national debates, while media literacy helps citizens to assess sources critically and recognise manipulation. LRAs should **treat local information resilience as part of climate governance**. They should support media literacy initiatives in schools, adult education and community settings, cooperate with independent local media while safeguarding pluralism and editorial independence, and ensure that information on funding, renovation support, mobility measures, energy communities, adaptation tools and local resilience investments is clear, accessible and regularly updated.

5.2 Recommendations for EU and national policymakers

1. Align the European Green Deal and Clean Industrial Deal narratives

The EGD and the CID use different entry points. The EGD presents the transition as a broad societal agenda, centred on climate neutrality, fairness, environmental integrity and quality of life. The CID frames the transition within competitiveness, industrial resilience, clean technology, energy security and strategic autonomy. This difference can create confusion if the two initiatives are perceived as competing priorities rather than complementary parts of the same transition. Accordingly, EU and national policymakers should communicate them as parts of a single transition strategy. The EGD explains why the transition is necessary: to achieve climate neutrality, strengthen resilience, protect fairness and improve quality of life. The CID explains how this transition can be delivered under current economic and geopolitical conditions: through investment, clean industrial capacity, affordable energy, skills, circularity and secure supply chains. Public communication should make it clear that competitiveness and climate ambition are mutually reinforcing, not rival objectives.

2. Combine ambition with realism

The green transition is also a geopolitical and economic security challenge. External signals, uneven international ambition, energy security concerns, critical raw materials, clean technology competition, and labour market transitions shape how citizens judge the credibility and fairness of EU climate policy. Accordingly, **EU and national communication should combine ambition with realism**. It should explain why climate action remains necessary despite uneven global ambition, how it strengthens resilience and reduces fossil fuel exposure, and how trade-offs around costs, dependencies, employment and sequencing will be managed. A credible narrative should be clear about uncertainty and trade-offs, without overpromising or becoming defensive.

3. Explain policy changes with legal certainty and transparency

Policy simplification, postponements, renaming and reformulation of green policies are potential sources of confusion where not clearly explained. Simplification is not in itself a rollback; it can be a legitimate tool to improve implementation and reduce unnecessary complexity. However, poorly communicated changes can create information gaps and allow misleading narratives to suggest that climate policy is failing, being abandoned or being weakened without scrutiny. EU and national policymakers should accompany any policy adjustment with **clear explanations of the legal basis, rationale, expected environmental and social impacts, timelines and transitional arrangements**. Communication should specify what is changing, what remains in place, and how long-term objectives will still be met. Legal certainty and information integrity should be treated as mutually reinforcing conditions for trust.

4. Distinguish legitimate concerns from misleading narratives

Questions about feasibility, costs, timing, competitiveness, food security, territorial impacts, administrative burden, and access to alternatives may be raised in good faith. Treating such concerns as disinformation merely because they challenge climate measures risks deepening polarisation and mistrust. EU and national policymakers should **distinguish clearly between false or misleading claims and good faith policy criticism**. Legitimate concerns should be addressed through evidence, structured dialogue and practical solutions, while disinformation should be countered firmly and transparently. Democratic disagreement should be recognised as part of policy legitimacy, not treated as a threat to climate action.

5. Build stakeholder dialogue into policy design as well as communication

Some controversies around EGD elements intensified where affected sectors felt insufficiently recognised, implementation pathways were unclear, or clarification came late in the process. Stakeholder engagement should be treated as both a communication tool and as a way to identify trade-offs, feasibility concerns and unintended consequences before positions become polarised. EU and national policymakers should **embed structured dialogue early in the policy process**. Farmers, industry, consumers, workers, civil society, scientists, LRAs, and vulnerable groups should be engaged while policy options are still being shaped, and before public positions harden. This can improve policy design, strengthen legitimacy, and reduce the space for misleading narratives to frame the debate.

5.3 Recommendations for other stakeholder groups

1. Civil society, scientists and fact-checkers should combine accuracy with accessibility

There is an asymmetry between evidence-based communication and platform-

driven amplification. Scientific and institutional rebuttals may be persuasive in expert, policy or traditional media spaces, but fail to reach wider publics unless adapted to the formats, language and culture of high-impact platforms. **Civil society organisations, scientific actors and fact-checkers should translate evidence into accessible, visually clear and platform-appropriate formats.** Accuracy should remain the foundation, but evidence must be communicated in ways that are understandable, timely, and relevant to the concerns of non-specialist audiences.

2. Sectoral organisations should communicate concerns responsibly

Affected sectors, including farming, livestock, industry, transport and energy actors, may raise legitimate concerns about costs, competitiveness, infrastructure, livelihoods and regulatory certainty. Selective evidence, emotional framing and false trade-offs can distort debate when they imply that climate action is inherently impossible or socially harmful. **Sectoral organisations should communicate their concerns transparently, with evidence and clear assumptions.** They should avoid framing transition choices as absolute trade-offs and should distinguish between criticism of specific measures and claims that undermine climate action more broadly. Responsible sectoral communication can strengthen, rather than weaken, democratic debate.

3. Educators and youth organisations should build long-term resilience

Media and digital literacy are essential for helping citizens to assess information critically and recognise misleading narratives. Schools, youth engagement and intergenerational learning all have a role to play in strengthening resilience to misinformation. **Educators, schools and youth organisations should integrate climate-related media literacy into learning activities.** Young people should be equipped to understand climate change and to evaluate sources, recognise manipulation, verify claims, and participate constructively in public debate.

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