

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS FOR THE SELECTION OF MEMBERS OF THE HIGH-LEVEL EXPERT GROUP ON FAKE NEWS

1. Background and mandate of the High-Level expert group on fake news

Fake news – stories that are fabricated intentionally – have always existed. What makes this phenomenon more pervasive and impactful today than ever before is the ease at which news can be posted and shared by anyone on social media, the speed at which such news may spread, and the global reach they might effortlessly attain. News consumption patterns in the EU have rapidly evolved together with the influence of social media and other online platforms without editorial responsibility in the news distribution sector. This has affected citizens' trust of both mainstream media and social media, as vulnerabilities are exploited to undermine political institutions, manipulate public opinion and weaken the democratic debate across the EU.

Fake news is still ill-defined. It covers different types of misrepresentation or distortion of reality, intentionally created and spread in disregard of the public interest.

The issues of definition are relevant for the scope of possible policy options. Tackling fake news requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the problems journalism faces in the current news media landscape, as well as the role and responsibilities of social media users in spreading misinformation online. It also requires balancing fundamental principles such as freedom of expression, media pluralism, and the right of citizens to diverse and reliable information.

To address this problem, the Commission has set up a high-level group of experts ("the HLG") to advise on policy initiatives to counter disinformation spread online.

The Commission is calling for applications with a view to selecting members of the HLG.

The HLG's tasks shall be to advise the Commission on all issues arising in the context of fake information spread across traditional and social media and how to cope with its social and political consequences. More specifically the HLG shall:

1. Analyse in-depth the current situation and legal framework, as well as the potential political and social risks associated with the spread of disinformation online;
2. Define the scope of the problem and canvass legislative or non-legislative interventions to limit the dissemination of fake content; in doing so, a distinction should be drawn between false information amounting to illegal content under EU or national laws e.g. incitement to hatred, violence or terrorism, defamation, etc., and false information falling outside the scope of such laws, and therefore not illegal;
3. Define roles and responsibilities of all relevant stakeholders with attention to the functioning of social networks and other online platforms, and the vulnerabilities of professional news media;
4. Assess the effectiveness of the voluntary measures put in place so far by online platforms and news media organisations to counter fake news;
5. Assess possible improvements to such existing voluntary measures, especially regarding the use of:

- enhanced and more widely applied flagging and content verification systems including the development of advanced automatic tools;
 - innovative methods for tracking dissemination patterns of fake news online, removal of fake news originators and disseminators, impostor websites and social bots;
 - mechanisms to facilitate the exposure of relevant alternative news sources (e.g. traditional media) on users' social feeds
 - requirements for more transparency and accountability in the use of algorithms that rank online news content;
6. Sketch out the direction for developing quality journalism (data journalism, investigative journalism, etc.) and improving media literacy as complementary actions to promote trust in media and users' awareness;
 7. Identify guiding principles for possible self-regulation based on shared good practices and coordination of relevant policies and activities at EU and national levels;

2. Deliverables

The HLG is to hold its inaugural meeting in January 2018. Sub-groups may be set up as deemed useful, with a task of delivering written contributions on specific sub-topics to feed into the work of the HLG (see also chapter 3.3, fourth paragraph). The main deliverable of the HLG shall be a report due within an indicative timeline of 10 to 12 weeks consisting of the HLG's assessment and analysis and all other information that the HLG considers pertinent to its task.

3. Features of the HLG

3.1. COMPOSITION

The HLG shall consist of 25 to 30 members. Members shall be individuals appointed in their personal capacity (Type A members) and organisations (Type C members).

Members appointed in a personal capacity shall be individuals operating in the academic and independent journalism sectors (Category 1). Organisations shall be written press organisations (Category 2), broadcasting media (Category 3), civil society organisations and other organisations specialised in the detection of fake information on line (Category 4) and online platforms (Category 5). As far as possible, there should be adequate representation of each of the above categories, as well as appropriate representation of small and large organisations, while taking into account the mandate of the HLG and the applications received.

Members appointed in a personal capacity shall act independently and in the public interest.

Organisations shall nominate their representatives and shall be responsible for ensuring that their representatives provide a high level of expertise. The Commission may refuse the nomination of a representative by an organisation if it considers this nomination inappropriate in light of the requirements specified in chapter 4 of this call. The organisation concerned shall be asked to appoint another representative.

3.2. APPOINTMENT

Members shall be appointed by the Director General of the Commission's Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology ('DG CONNECT') from applicants complying with the requirements referred to in chapter 5 of this call.

Members shall be appointed until the end of 2018. The members shall remain in office until the end of their term of office which is renewable. The HLG will meet in the first quarter of 2018 in order to complete its mandate. The HLG may be requested to reconvene during its term of office should the need arise.

Registration in the Transparency Register is required in order for organisations to be appointed.

As regards Type A members, DG CONNECT shall appoint alternate members, in accordance with the same conditions as members, who shall automatically replace any members who are absent or indisposed.

In order to ensure continuity and the smooth functioning of the HLG, DG CONNECT shall establish a reserve list of suitable candidates that may be used to appoint replacements. DG CONNECT shall ask applicants for their consent before including their names on the reserve list.

Members who are no longer capable of contributing effectively to the HLG's deliberations, who in the opinion of DG CONNECT do not comply with the conditions set out in Article 339 of the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union or who resign, shall no longer be invited to participate in any meetings of the HLG and may be replaced for the remainder of their term of office.

3.3 RULES OF ENGAGEMENT AND OPERATION OF THE HLG

The Director-General of DG CONNECT shall nominate a Chairperson of the HLG.

The HLG shall act at the request of its chairman with the agreement of DG CONNECT, in compliance with the Commission's horizontal rules on expert groups¹ ('the horizontal rules').

The HLG shall meet at least three times during the first quarter of 2018 on Commission premises in order to discuss the progress of its work and to complete its task. The HLG may hold additional meetings if the Chairperson considers it necessary. DG CONNECT shall provide secretarial services.

DG CNECT may set up sub-groups from its members for the purpose of examining specific questions on the basis of terms of reference defined by DG CONNECT. Sub-groups shall operate in compliance with the horizontal rules and shall report to the HLG. They shall be dissolved as soon as their mandate is fulfilled.

Should sub-groups be created, the HLG shall nominate sub-group rapporteurs from amongst its members by simple majority.

Members and members' representatives should be prepared to attend meetings systematically, to contribute actively to discussions in the HLG or sub-groups, to be

¹ C(2016) 3301, art. 13.1.

involved in preparatory work ahead of meetings, to examine and provide comments on documents under discussion, and to act, as appropriate, as 'rapporteurs' on ad hoc basis.

As a general rule, working documents will be drafted in English and meetings will be also conducted in English.

The HLG shall adopt its opinions, recommendations or reports by consensus. In the event of a vote, the outcome of the vote shall be decided by simple majority of the members. The members that voted against or abstained shall have the right to have a document summarising the reasons for their position annexed to the opinions, recommendations or reports.

In agreement with DG CONNECT the HLG may, by simple majority of its members, decide that deliberations shall be public.

Participants in the activities of the HLG and sub-groups shall not be remunerated for the services they offer. Travel and subsistence expenses incurred by participants in the activities of the HLG and sub-groups shall be reimbursed by the Commission. Reimbursement shall be made in accordance with the provisions in force within the Commission and within the limits of the available appropriations allocated to the Commission departments under the annual procedure for the allocation of resources.

The members of the HLG and their representatives, as well as invited experts and observers, are subject to the obligation of professional secrecy, which by virtue of the Treaties and the rules implementing them applies to all members of the institutions and their staff, as well as to the Commission's rules on security regarding the protection of Union classified information, laid down in Commission Decisions (EU, Euratom) 2015/443² and 2015/444³. Should they fail to respect these obligations, the Commission may take all appropriate measures.

On a proposal by and in agreement with DG CONNECT the HLG shall adopt its rules of procedure on the basis of the standard rules of procedure for expert groups.

DG CONNECT may invite experts with specific expertise with respect to a subject matter on the agenda to take part in the work of the HLG or sub-groups on an *ad hoc* basis.

Individuals, organisations and public entities may be granted an observer status, in compliance with the horizontal rules, by direct invitation. Organisations and public entities appointed as observers shall nominate their representatives. Observers and their representatives may be permitted by the Chair to take part in the discussions of the HLG and provide expertise. However, they shall not have voting rights and shall not participate in the formulation of recommendations or advice of the HLG.

² Commission Decision (EU, Erratum) 2015/443 of 13 March 2015 on Security in the Commission (OJ L 72, 17.3.2015, p. 41).

³ Commission Decision (EU, Euratom) 2015/444 of 13 March 2015 on the security rules for protecting EU classified information (OJ L 72, 17.3.2015, p. 53).

3.4. TRANSPARENCY

The HLG shall be registered in the Register of Commission expert groups and other similar entities ('the Register of expert groups').

As concerns the HLG composition, DG CONNECT shall publish the following data on the Register of expert groups:

- the name of individuals appointed in a personal capacity;
- the name of member organisations; the interest represented shall be disclosed;
- the name of observers;

DG CONNECT shall make available all relevant documents, including the agendas, the minutes and the participants' submissions, either on the Register of expert groups or *via* a link from the Register to a dedicated website, where this information can be found. Access to dedicated websites shall not be submitted to user registration or any other restriction. In particular, DG CONNECT shall ensure publication of the agenda and other relevant background documents in due time ahead of the meeting, followed by timely publication of minutes. Exceptions to publication shall only be foreseen where it is deemed that disclosure of a document would undermine the protection of a public or private interest as defined in Article 4 of Regulation (EC) N° 1049/2001⁴.

Personal data shall be collected, processed and published in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 45/2001.

4. Application procedure

Interested individuals and organisations are invited to submit their application to the European Commission, DG CONNECT, e-mail address: cnect-eg-on-fakenews@ec.europa.eu

Applications must be completed in one of the official languages of the European Union. However, applications in English would facilitate the evaluation procedure. If another language is used, it would be helpful to include a summary of the application in English.

Organisations shall indicate the name of their representative(s) in the HLG. These representatives should be duly empowered to act in the name and on behalf of the appointing organisation for the purposes of carrying out their tasks under the HLG's mandate.

An application will be deemed admissible only if it is sent by the deadline and includes the documents referred to below. All documents submitted by applicants should be duly filled in, legible, signed and numbered sequentially.

Supporting documents

⁴ These exceptions are intended to protect public security, military affairs, international relations, financial, monetary or economic policy, privacy and integrity of the individual, commercial interests, court proceedings and legal advice, inspections/investigations/audits and the institution's decision-making process.

Each application shall include the following documents:

- a cover letter explaining the applicant's motivation for answering this call and stating what contribution the applicant could make to the HLG;
- a classification form duly filled in specifying the member category for which the application is made (Annex I).
- a selection criteria form duly filled in documenting how the applicant fulfils the selection criteria listed in chapter 4 of this call (Annex II).

For individuals applying to be appointed as members of the HLG in a personal capacity, as well as for individuals indicated by organisations as their representatives, a URL for an online *curriculum vitae* (CV) shall also be provided. All CVs shall be submitted in the European format.⁵

Individuals applying to be appointed as members of the HLG in a personal capacity (type A members) must disclose any circumstances that could give rise to a conflict of interest by submitting a declaration of interests ('DOI') form on the basis of the standard DOI form for expert groups attached to this call. Submission of a duly completed DOI form is necessary in order to be eligible to be appointed in a personal capacity. DG CONNECT shall perform the conflict of interest assessment in compliance with article 11 of the horizontal rules.

Additional supporting documents may be requested at a later stage.

Deadline for application

The duly signed applications must be sent by 13. December, 2017 at the latest. The date of sending will be established as follows:

- Where applications are sent by e-mail to the following e-mail address: connect-eg-on-fakenews@ec.europa.eu, the date of the e-mail will be the date of sending.
- Where applications are sent by post to the following address: European Commission, DG CONNECT, Unit I.4 secretariat – BU 25, B-1049 Brussels, the postmark will be considered the date of sending.
- Where applications are hand-delivered to the following address: European Commission, DG CONNECT, Unit I.4 secretariat – 25 av Beaulieu, Brussels (Auderghem), the date on the receipt given upon delivery will be considered the date of sending.

5. Selection criteria

DG CONNECT will take the following criteria into account when assessing applications:

- proven competence and experience in areas referred to in chapter 1 of this call relevant to the HLG's activities (all applicants, see more details below);

⁵ <https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/en/documents/curriculum-vitae/templates-instructions>

- absence of circumstances that could give rise to a conflict of interest (individuals applying to be appointed in a personal capacity only);
- good knowledge of English allowing active participation in the discussions (individuals applying to be appointed in a personal capacity and organisations' representatives).

More specifically:

Type A members

(1) Academia and journalism: Proven competence and experience in any discipline relevant to the HLG's work, including: media policy, algorithmic transparency, sociology, education, social psychology, cognitive sciences, economics of platforms, journalism, law, fundamental rights, data protection, e-governance.

Type C members

(2) Written press organisations: proven relevant business activities and experience in news publishing, including multi-platform delivery of news. Nominees proposed by organisations in this category should work for an undertaking active in these areas or a body representing such undertakings.

(3) Broadcasting organisations: proven and relevant business activities and experience in news broadcasting, including multi-platform delivery of news. Nominees proposed by organisations in this category should work for an undertaking active in these areas or a body representing such undertakings.

(4) Civil society organisations including organisations specialised in the detection of fake information online: proven and relevant activities and experience in any area of advocacy and representation relevant to the HLG's work; and fact-checking as a separate sub-category

(5) Online platforms: proven relevant business activities and experience in undertakings operating online social networking and/or content search services or in a relevant body representing such undertakings.

6. Selection procedure

DG CONNECT shall assess the applications against the selection criteria and establish a list of the most suitable applicants. It will conclude by appointing the members of the HLG.

When defining the composition of the HLG, DG CONNECT shall aim at ensuring as far as possible a high level of expertise and a balanced representation of relevant know-how and areas of interest mentioned in section 3.1 above, taking into account the specific tasks of the HLG, the type of expertise required and the relevance of the applications received.

Where individual experts are appointed in a personal capacity, DG CONNECT shall also seek geographical and gender balance.

For further information please contact DG CONNECT by e-mail: connect-eg-on-fakenews@ec.europa.eu .

ANNEXES:

- Classification form (Annex I)
- Selection criteria form (Annex II)
- Standard declaration of interests (To be used only by individuals applying to be appointed in a personal capacity – Annex III)
- Guidance for filling in the declaration of interests (To be used only by individuals applying to be appointed in a personal capacity – Annex IV)
 - Standard-Privacy-Statement-HLG Fake news (Annex V)