

27th EDITION

Lisbon Forum 2021

Intercultural Dialogue in the Infodemic era

9-10 December 2021

Hybrid (in Lisbon and online)



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Concept note

COVID-19 has accelerated and enlarged the fourth industrial revolution and with it, the effects of another pandemic: the information epidemic. Alongside the opportunities generated by the evolution of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), the infodemic brings about major social, economic, and political consequences that perpetuate the cycle of inequality - online and offline - and discourage the cooperation needed to face global challenges together.

In the past 10 years, the evolution of digital technologies, together with the exponential increase of online content and data personalisation, have changed the dynamics and influence of the internet. ICTs have become an important factor in the production and reproduction of social inequality. The internet has penetrated every single aspect of our life, from healthcare to social relations. Yet, having the chance to be more connected is not automatically a solution to the world's divisions.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, the internet - a worldwide public forum, with the possibility to be accessed by anyone anywhere - was perceived as the perfect place for a wide and open dialogue likely to improve public accountability, political participation, and inclusion. Today, this potential is shadowed, among other factors, by the increased misuse and abuse of information online. The Cambridge Analytica data scandal in 2018, for instance, is one of the many reports that flagged the dangers of digital information dynamics, its pollution, and its contagious effects.

Disinformation and misinformation are two of the most widespread phenomena associated with information pollution. They aggravate stereotyping, misrepresentation, discrimination and polarisation, all factors that influence the prevalence of hate speech. The increased use of so-called "filter bubbles" and the emergence of "echo chambers" weaken the positive effects of increased digital interconnectedness, and reduce the possibility of it becoming the inclusive global agora it could be. Instead, people are increasingly led to live with power narratives, and worldviews that serve specific interests or, to remain in a comfort zone of news that confirms and reinforces their existing beliefs. And all in all these factors contribute to the creation of a world where people experience less opportunity to encounter the Other or opposing views.

Dialogue in general – and intercultural dialogue in particular – aim precisely at creating an open and respectful exchange of views based on mutual understanding and respect between individuals and groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds or heritage. As highlighted in the White Paper for Intercultural Dialogue of the Council of Europe, through agreements on ideas, meanings, and practical actions, processes of intercultural dialogue have, as their overriding objective, to "promote full respect of human rights, democracy and the rule of law". Intercultural dialogue has been traditionally employed to advance social cohesion, intergroup solidarity, and intercultural understanding. However, the impact of these solutions is limited in an online context. Moreover, its resilience has been put to the test due to the social restrictions imposed by the pandemic and the impact of Covid-19.

We observe anyhow encouraging and creative ways to promote cross-cultural and inter-solidarity initiatives that counter current obstacles and that mobilise efforts for collective action. Initiatives that, rather than focusing on the opposition of “me” versus “the Other”, reinforce the idea of “us”.

Governments and international organisations are also joining forces to accelerate responses and keep up with the fast pace of new technologies, to fill governance and regulation gaps, and to bridge the divides: [UNESCO's #Thinkbeforesharing](#), which aims to stop the spread of conspiracy theories, or [Global Policy.AI](#), an online multilateral platform between intergovernmental organisations, which aims to support inclusive development policies in Artificial Intelligence, are just but a few examples of good practice in this domain.

How can we stimulate responses to combat the forces of misinformation, disinformation, filter bubbles and echo chambers – information viruses – that hinder the capacity to have a common view on underlying problems - such as a pandemic, climate change, or the migration crisis? How can we create consciousness from our own culture and worldviews of the need to overcome the infodemic for the sake of mutual understanding? How can we prompt innovative formats for intercultural dialogue as a solution to contain the spread of the *infodemic*? What knowledge, skills, and tools are required in the 21st century to improve critical understanding of the world amidst the huge amount of information around us, or the lack of access to it? If there is not yet immunity to the *infodemic*, how can we better protect those who are disproportionately affected by it in the meantime?

To offer a constructive platform for dialogue between Europe and other parts of the world from a win-win perspective, this year's Lisbon Forum seeks to address these questions by inviting a wide spectrum of voices to the table for dialogue. The main conclusions resulting from this year's Lisbon Forum will be integrated in the North-South Centre's future projects.

¹The blended term infodemic was coined by Rothkopf DK in 2003 in his article “When the buzz bites back” to explain how “a few facts, mixed with fear, speculation, and rumour, amplified and relayed swiftly worldwide by modern information technologies, have affected national and international economies, politics and even security in ways that are utterly disproportionate with the root realities” The Washington Post 2003. Available: www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/2003/05/11/when-the-buzz-bites-back/bc8cd84f-cab6-4648-bf58-0277261af6cd/ (consulté le 2021 juin 15).

²The term “filter bubble” was coined by Eli Pariser in his 2012 book “The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You”.

³According to legal scholar and behavioural economist Cass Sunstein, the main cause of polarization is that internet technologies have changed the world in such a way that people do not run into the other side anymore but rather interact through online echo chambers.

Format and Programme

The Lisbon Forum 2021 will be held with a hybrid format on 9-10 December 2021 (in Lisbon and online)

The Forum aims at being a distinctive platform for dialogue and reflection:

- among international and regional organisations,
- among the four sectors of the quadrilogue: governments, parliaments, local and regional authorities, and civil society.

The programme will be structured along four main themes under the slogan:

#BREAKYOURBUBBLE

The slogan aims at drawing attention to the concept of infodemic and the whole critique of algorithmic-based personalization of the internet based on 'echo chambers' and 'filter bubbles'. The 'bubble' refers here also to the 'comfort zone' when one is not confronted with the Other; where worldviews, cultures, and social classes live together without entering in dialogue with the Other.

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| Break your bubble... with dialogue! | Break your bubble... for human rights! | Break your bubble... for global solidarity! | Break your bubble... for a democratic internet! |
| 9 December | 9 December | 10 December | 10 December |
| This angle will explore the power of intercultural and intercivlisational dialogue (if streamlined) to counter the infodemic. | Living in the bubble means living with your own (and others') biases, stereotypes, and prejudices towards the Other, which may lead to hate speech and discrimination. This angle will explore ways of combating hate speech online, promoting human rights-based narratives and freedom of expression. | Research has evidenced that AI-based content and tools are often reproducing the same inequalities that one can face in the offline world. The 2021 Global Risks Report of the World Economic Forum alerted that growing digital divides are among the main risks that feed social fractures and undermine inclusive recovery. The need for global solidarity to face the worlds' divides is permanent. Acting united requires going outside of one's comfort zone to solidarise with the Other. | Breaking the bubble means controlling one's own persona on the internet, specifically on platforms where one's personal data are tracked, gathered and put on the market. Democratising the internet, among other things, means also living online in a plurality of opinions, currents, and thoughts; confronting and challenging them. But it also means regulation and ethical guidelines, inclusiveness, diversity, and truthfulness. |

Background

For over 32 years, the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity - the North-South Centre - has acted as an interface for the Council of Europe's vocation for solidarity, dialogue, and partnership inside Europe and abroad. As an Enlarged Partial Agreement, the Centre is the result of the strong political will of its member states to develop – together with civil society - regional and interregional cooperation that leads to stronger, more resilient, and critically aware societies based on the values of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

The Lisbon Forum is a distinctive platform for dialogue for policymakers, academics, and activists on issues related to global interdependence and solidarity. It enables networking, sharing of knowledge, and the mainstreaming of good practice among people from different fields of expertise, in order to mobilise commitment to act together in response to global challenges.

Since 2020, the Lisbon Forum has been the epilogue of the North-South Centre's public campaign that calls for collective mobilisation for solidarity against inequalities. In the second half of the 2021 Lisbon Forum campaign will raise awareness and exchange knowledge on how to counter misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech online through inclusive and intercultural dialogue.

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The campaign will include the following milestones:

- A joint session during the [Meta-University 2021](#) on **Intercultural Dialogue in online settings**
- A series of **four podcasts** to be distributed in listening apps

| Episode title | Description |
|---|---|
| Episode #1 Practical tools to combat misinformation and disinformation online | This episode will explore the question: what knowledge, skills and tools are required in the 21st century to combat misinformation and disinformation online? The episode will be informative in nature aiming to bring light to the new emerging trends and techniques for activists engaged in fighting mis- and disinformation online. |
| Episode #2 Demystifying myths about immigration: how to tackle disinformation and misinformation about migrants and refugees? | This episode will look at the work of grassroots organisations in protecting migrants and refugees, as one of the groups most affected by the infodemic. The episode will also try to highlight different approaches taken from different geographical, social, cultural and political contexts. This episode will illustrate a range of actions that could be taken in response to the question: If there is no immunity to the infodemic yet, how can we in the meantime better protect those who are disproportionately affected by it? |
| Episode #3 The role of young people in the fight against disinformation and misinformation | This episode will explore further the question of how we can stimulate the responses needed to combat more efficiently information viruses that hinder the capacity to have a common view on underlying problems - such as a pandemic, climate change, or the migration crisis? It will also bring light to strategies that can be utilised to combat hate speech through the use of narratives. |
| Episode #4 Innovative formats for intercultural dialogue online and offline to tackle the spread of the infodemic? | This episode will try to answer the question, 'How we can prompt innovative formats for intercultural dialogue online and offline to contain the spread of the infodemic?' It will look at intercultural dialogue as a tool to combat mis- and disinformation online, as well as hate speech. |

- A joint activity during the [Global Education Week 2021](#) mobilising students in Europe to take part in a workshop on **Navigating the toxic internet: critical thinking, digital tools, intercultural dialogue.**