

European Commission tells largest platforms to label AI deepfakes during elections

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Source: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_1707

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Today, the Commission has published guidelines on recommended measures to Very Large Online Platforms and Search Engines to mitigate systemic risks online that may impact the integrity of elections, with specific guidance for the upcoming European Parliament elections in June.

Under the Digital Services Act (DSA), designated services with more than 45 million active users in the EU have the obligation to mitigate the risks related to electoral processes, while safeguarding fundamental rights, including the right to freedom of expression.

These guidelines recommend mitigation measures and best practices to be undertaken by Very Large Online Platforms and Search Engines before, during, and after electoral events, such as to:

* **Reinforce their internal processes***, including by setting up internal teams with adequate resources, using available analysis and information on local context-specific risks and on the use of their services by users to search and obtain information before, during and after elections, to improve their mitigation measures. *

Implement elections-specific risk mitigation measures**tailored to each individual electoral period and local context**. Among the mitigation measures included in the guidelines, Very Large Online Platforms and Search Engines should promote official information on electoral processes, implement media literacy initiatives, and adapt their recommender systems to empower users and reduce the monetisation and virality of content that threatens the integrity of electoral processes. Moreover, **political advertising should be clearly labelled as such**, in anticipation of the new regulation on the transparency and targeting of political advertising. * **Adopt specific mitigation measures linked to generative AI**: Very Large Online Platforms and Search Engines whose services could be used to create and/or disseminate generative AI content should assess and mitigate specific risks linked to AI, for example by clearly labelling content generated by AI (such as deepfakes), adapting their terms and conditions accordingly and enforcing them adequately. * **Cooperate with EU level and national authorities, independent experts, and civil society organisations**to foster an efficient exchange of information before, during and after the election and facilitate the use of adequate mitigation measures, including in the areas of Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI), disinformation and cybersecurity. * **Adopt specific measures, including an incident response mechanism, during an electoral period**to reduce the impact of incidents that could have a significant effect on the election outcome or turnout. * **Assess the effectiveness of the measures**through post-election reviews. Very Large Online Platforms and Search Engines should publish a non-confidential version of such post-election review documents, providing opportunity for public feedback on the risk mitigation measures put in place.

The guidelines include **specific measures ahead of the upcoming European elections**. Given their unique cross-border and European dimension, Very Large Online Platforms and Search Engines should ensure that **sufficient resources and****risk mitigation measures** are available and distributed in a way that is proportionate to the risk assessments. The guidelines also encourage close cooperation with the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) Task Force on the 2024 European elections.

The guidelines take into account the input received from the public consultation launched by the Commission on 8 February 2024. The Commission also cooperated with Digital Services Coordinators in the framework of the European Board for Digital Services on the guidelines. The guidelines also encourage **third party scrutiny and research into mitigation measures**to ensure that the measures put in place are effective and respect fundamental rights.

Next Steps

The specific mitigation measures that a Very Large Online Platform or Search Engine should take depend on the

specificities of their service and on their risk profile. The guidelines represent **best practices** for mitigating risks related to electoral processes at this **moment in time**. As such, Very Large Online Platforms and Search Engines which do not follow these guidelines must prove to the Commission that the measures undertaken are equally effective in mitigating the risks. Should the Commission receive information casting doubt on the suitability of such measures, it can request further information or start formal proceedings under the Digital Services Act.

To add an additional element of readiness, the Commission plans a **stress test with relevant stakeholders** at the end of April to exercise the most effective use of the instruments and the cooperative mechanisms that have been put in place.

Background

Protecting the integrity of elections is one of the main priorities for the enforcement of the DSA. Considering the high number of elections taking place in the EU in 2024, including the upcoming European elections, measures undertaken by online providers, including Very Large Online Platforms and Search Engines, to prevent negative effects on democratic processes, civic discourse and electoral processes are being carefully monitored in the context of the DSA.

Since the entry into force of the DSA for the first designated Very Large Online Platforms and Search Engines at the end of August 2023, the Commission has engaged in **election integrity readiness dialogues** with several Very Large Online Platforms and Search Engines ahead of national elections, in order to monitor their effective compliance with the DSA.

In February 2024, the Commission launched a **public consultation** on the draft guidelines for elections, receiving 89 replies by several interested parties, including civil society organisations, business associations, companies, and citizens. These guidelines also build on the ongoing work under the Code of Practice on disinformation, the Regulation on transparency of political advertising and the Commission Recommendation on inclusive and resilient electoral processes, among others.

For More Information

Guidelines on the mitigation of systemic risks for electoral processes

Digital Services Act package

Tackling online disinformation

Public consultation summary