



# Screens as Battlefields

Navigating the Challenges  
of Resources and Tools  
in Debunking Russian-Ukrainian  
War Propaganda

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EDMO SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE  
26 FEBRUARY 2023

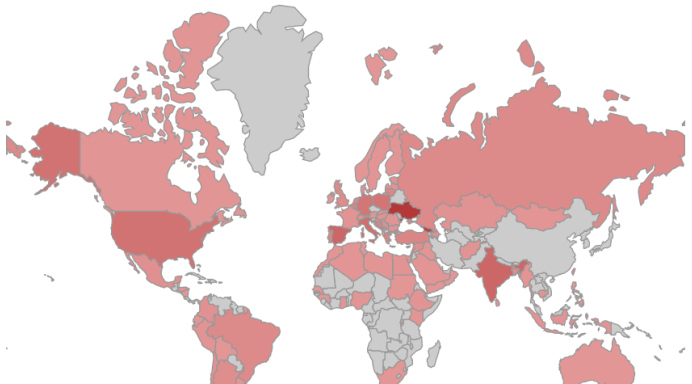


# #UkraineFacts


By the International Fact-checking Network Signatories

Developed by Maldita.es

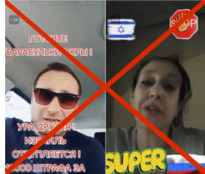
EN/ES



**DEBUNKED DISINFORMATION : 2965 FACT-CHECKS**  
Scroll down to see more



The video shows NATO's military vehicles delivered from America to Europe for the war in Ukraine: they belong to a US combat brigade stationed in Poland. They will not be delivered to Ukraine but are on their way back to the US.  
Invalid Date



Public display of Ukrainian flags is prohibited by law in Israel. Otherwise, the fine is 10,000 Israeli shekels: the bill of similar content was not presented, and the Knesset, the Israeli legislative body, did not adopt the law of similar content.  
Invalid Date



European Digital Media Observatory

Show 10 entries

↑ Date	Country	Title	Link
26/04/2025	Germany, Correctiv	Milan: This video of a billboard with Selenskyj is manipulated	<a href="https://correctiv.org/faktenche...">https://correctiv.org/faktenche...</a>
25/04/2024	Germany, Correctiv	No, Ukrainian refugees do not receive 688 euros in child benefit per child.	<a href="https://correctiv.org/faktenche...">https://correctiv.org/faktenche...</a>
12/05/2023	France, AFP Factuel	Pro-Russian propaganda articles published by Le Parisien? No, they come from a pirate site	<a href="https://factuel.afp.com/doc.af...">https://factuel.afp.com/doc.af...</a>
02/05/2023	France, AFP Factuel	Beware of this video presented as a "staging" of the Ukrainian authorities	<a href="https://factuel.afp.com/doc.af...">https://factuel.afp.com/doc.af...</a>
02/05/2023	France, AFP Factuel	Forged poster shared to claim 'homeless people recruited in US to fight in Ukraine'	<a href="https://factcheck.afp.com/doc...">https://factcheck.afp.com/doc...</a>
02/05/2023	France, AFP Factuel	Old port fire video falsely shared as 'Israeli attack on Iran's military aid to Russia'	<a href="https://factcheck.afp.com/doc...">https://factcheck.afp.com/doc...</a>
01/05/2023	France, AFP Factuel	Fake CNN tweet on Zelensky, immigration spreads online	<a href="https://factcheck.afp.com/doc...">https://factcheck.afp.com/doc...</a>

## Information disorders have no borders

3,030 fact-checks through #UkraineFacts  
111 organisations (IFCN)

2,309 fact-checks through the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO, 42 organisations)

since February 24, 2022





# Fact-checking in the context of war propaganda

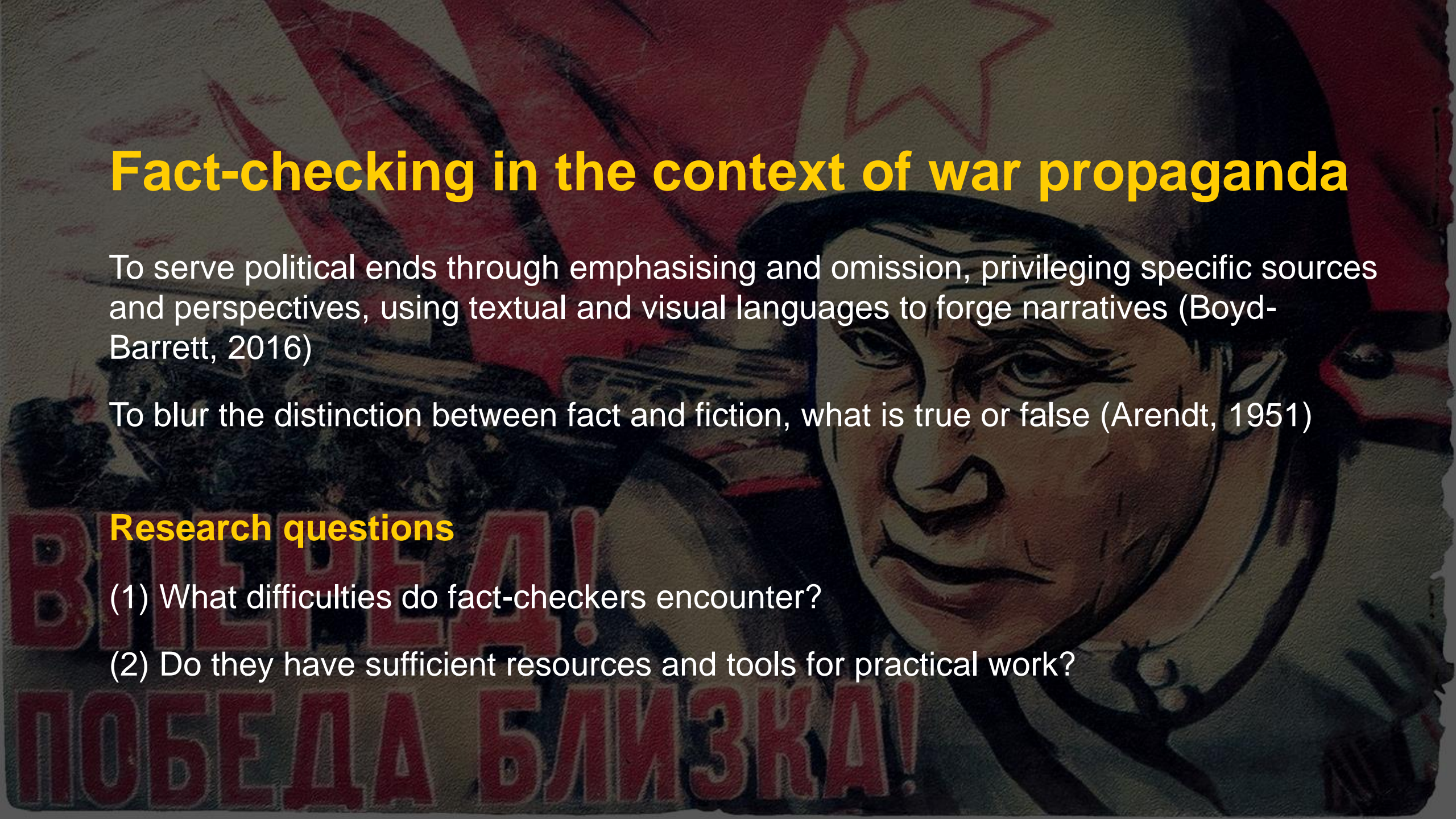
To serve political ends through emphasising and omission, privileging specific sources and perspectives, using textual and visual languages to forge narratives (Boyd-Barrett, 2016)

To blur the distinction between fact and fiction, what is true or false (Arendt, 1951)

## Research questions

(1) What difficulties do fact-checkers encounter?

(2) Do they have sufficient resources and tools for practical work?





# A mixed and iterative method

- I. 7 exploratory interviews (March – April 2022)  
*(Flemish Belgium, Sweden, Norway, Denmark)*

**BUILDING THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

- II. Quantitative survey, GlobalFact9 (June 2022)  
85 answers from fact-checkers working in 46 countries  
*(Europe, Asia, Africa, North and South America)*

**BUILDING THE INTERVIEW GUIDE**

- III. 20 semi-conducted interviews (September 2022 – May 2023)  
*(Afghanistan, Azerbaidjan, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Hungary, India, Italy, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Serbia/Croatia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden)*



# A. Exploratory interviews

## Challenges

Difficulty in accessing reliable sources on either side of the conflict  
Language barriers  
Troll factories and (ex-pandemic) plotters

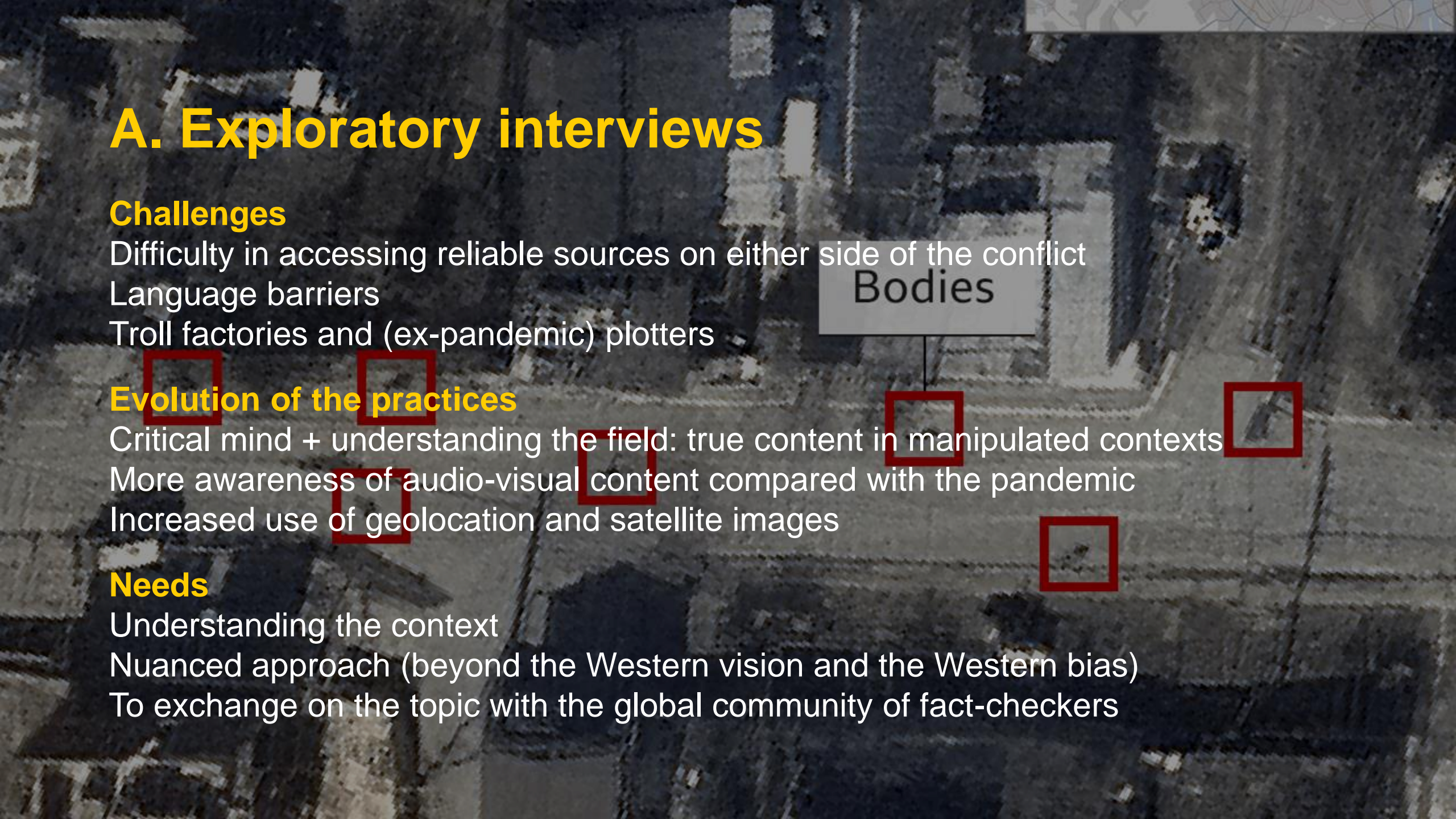
## Evolution of the practices

Critical mind + understanding the field: true content in manipulated contexts  
More awareness of audio-visual content compared with the pandemic  
Increased use of geolocation and satellite images

## Needs

Understanding the context  
Nuanced approach (beyond the Western vision and the Western bias)  
To exchange on the topic with the global community of fact-checkers

Bodies





# From fact-checking the pandemic to fact-checking the war

## Misinformation & Disinformation vs Disinformation & Propaganda

### Information sources

- Pandemic: statistics, experts, “easier” to fact-check
- Ukraine war: more difficult access to information sources, uncertainty of the reliability of the source, language (Russian, Ukrainian)

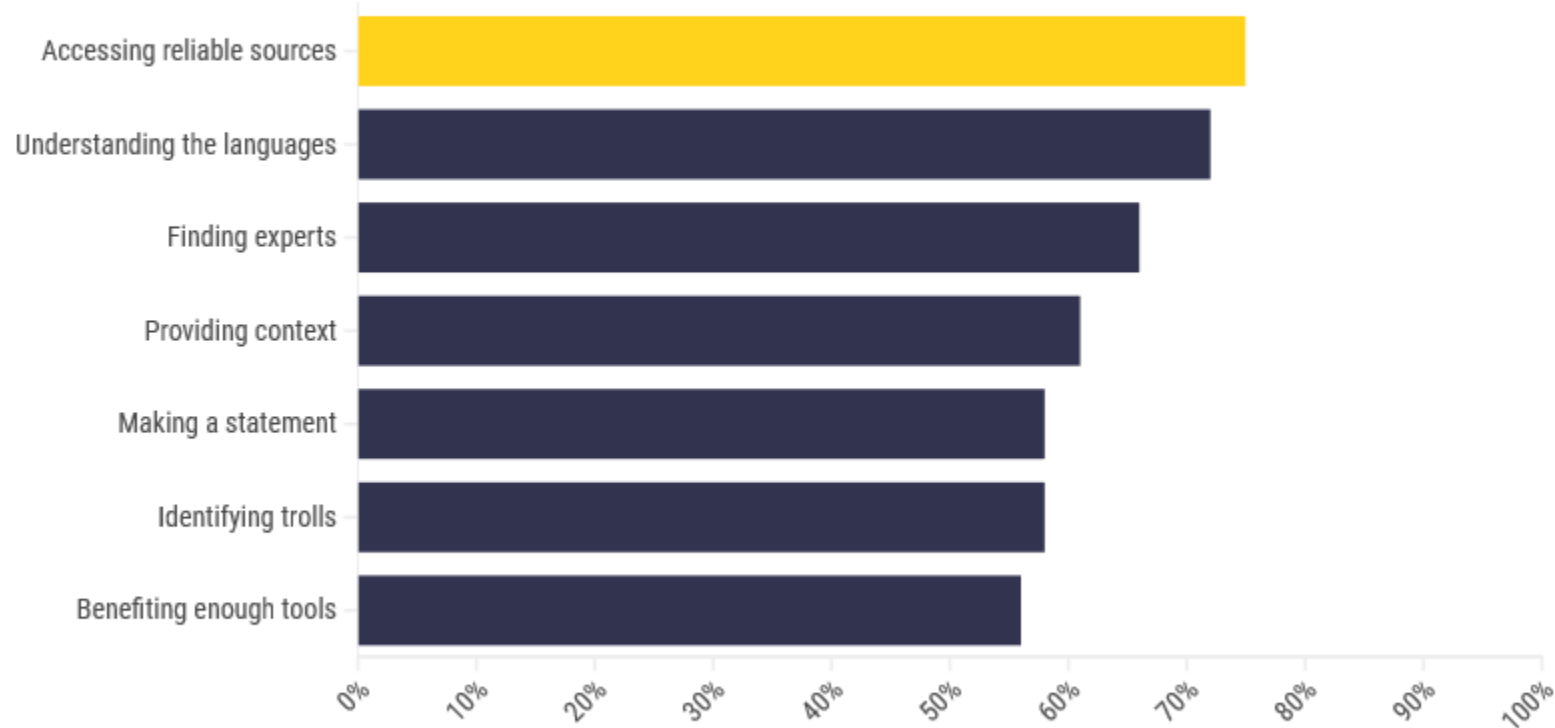
*"Differs in many ways of fact-checking the pandemic, when fact-checkers relied on statistics and experts. So, it is a completely different way of working."*

*"It's really hard to find the source. There are no journalists (...) in many of the cities where videos and the picture come from. There are no journalists. So, that's hard."*

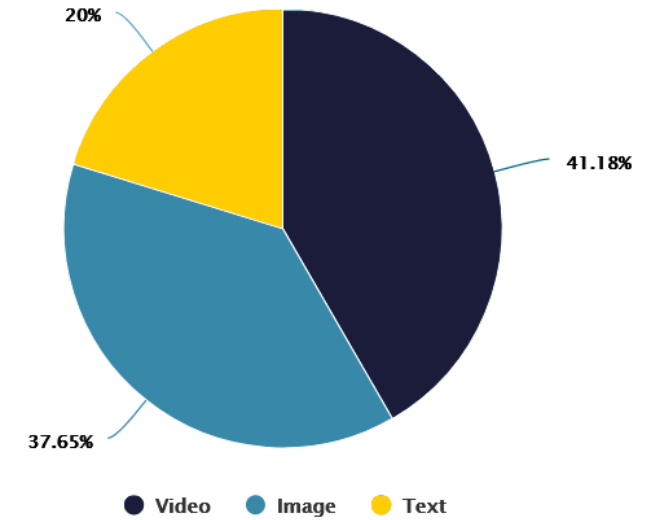
# B. Online survey

## Fact-checking the Ukraine war: accessing reliable sources is the most challenging

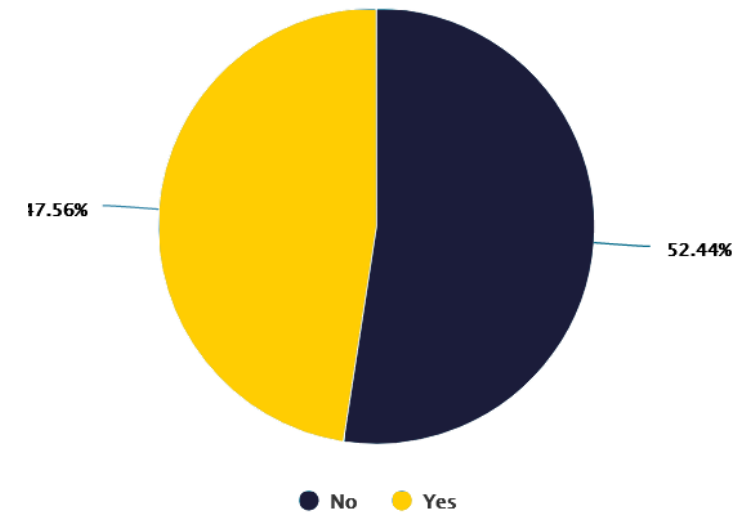
Survey conducted in June 2022 with 85 fact-checkers participating in GlobalFact9 (Oslo)



University of Bergen/NORDIS



Having enough resources and tools



# 1) A lack of accessibility makes the war complex to fact-check

## 2) Propaganda is harder to fact-check

- A lot of tools are available, but which one to use?
- Language: limited accuracy of translation tools
- Tool cost barrier (small organizations)
- Lack of background on the conflict (tools can't help to understand the context)
- Distance from the front line
- Hard to contact independent and reliable sources and get answers



All results are available on: <https://ohmy.shinyapps.io/globalfact/>



# C. Interviews with fact-checkers

## Challenges are context-dependent

- Size of the organisation (micro-organisations could do more on the war)
- Fact-checking model (slow journalism vs hard news, e.g., France)
- Political (e.g., Hungary, Italy)
- Social (e.g., Germany, Poland)
- Geographical (proximity = more concerns)
- Professional background / Age / Skills

**But common patterns observed**



# Main identified challenges

**Understanding the context:** Propaganda rooted in a complex geopolitical history

**Understanding the languages:** Limited efficiency of available tools (confirmed)

**Trusting the information sources:** Both Ukrainians and Russians are part of the conflict

**Limited efficiency of images/videos verification tools:** Requires thinking outside the box, using geolocation or contacting fact-checkers/sources on the field

The origin of some disinformation remains unclear, making it difficult to discern the motives behind certain narratives (no meta data on social media)

Information vacuum (not possible to fact-check everything)



# Context matters

Disinformation travels from country to country in local contexts

*Ukrainian refugees are better treated*

The distance does not allow to go on the field to verify + limited efficiency of geolocation, collaborations with journalists/fact-checkers abroad needed

It also travels from topic to topic (images from the pandemic used in a war context)

Influence the selection (related to the country, viral in the country)

Social media are a battlefield, disinformation connected to facts related to the war

*Norway helped the US to destroy Nord Stream*

A shared history with Russia makes fact-checkers more critical or “immunised”

Allows a better overview of the broader geopolitical challenges

In this context, Russian propaganda more oriented towards emotional factors

In pro-Russian countries, fact-checkers are more exposed to critics and harassment.

# Dealing with violence

Images and sounds may severely affect fact-checkers, no matter the location (fact-checker in Ghana said having taken a break because it was too hard, reports of emotional or sleep troubles), experimented journalists/fact-checkers seem more resistant

Violent images are not only about the war but also about homophobic content (to illustrate the perverted West: in Georgia, the war is presented as a punishment)

Violent images are more problematic for regular people and kids

Most violent content on Telegram, true content

Internal rating systems to indicate the level of violence

Importance of trainings to learn the technique to mitigate the effects (mute the sound of the video)





# A need for resources and tools

Training on propaganda (history, methods and discourses)

Specific knowledge (effects on the war, military)

Limited efficiency of Meta tools implies human monitoring, does not work well for some countries (Azerbaijan) - *"The Facebook tool that we use as a part of the cooperation with Meta has not always been super helpful and does not always pick all the relevant things"* (Germany)

Monitoring Telegram for Ukrainian and Russian communities abroad (translation included, Finland). **Dream tool:** automated monitoring of all social media

Limited efficiency of translation tools (need a double check)

Having a multilingual team is an asset = improving tools for smaller languages

Need to reach large audiences (especially for small organisations)



# Additional observations

Added values of being a part of a fact-checking network to exchange, collaborate, ask for help, get moral support, or get access to specific tools = team spirit

From one topic to another: from COVID-19 disinformation to war disinformation

Impossibility to fact-check everything because there is not enough evidence (information vacuum) and to fact-check opinions or separate opinions from facts

Debunking does not make disappear the whole narrative ("*The Ukrainians are nazis*", Hungary)

Access to public information is not equal everywhere in Europe

**Overall lack of trust in AI solutions (fear of GAI)**



# Fact check: The 'Ghost of Kyiv' pilot

Ines Eisele  
05/04/2022

The Ukrainian fighter pilot, several Russian jets shot down in Kyiv? "Fantasma de Kiev": Vídeo de abater sete caças russos sozira



Claim by Varias fuentes:  
Foto de un hombre con el rostro cubierto es "El Fantasma de Kiev" ucraniano

AFP Factual rating: Falso  
La supuesta foto del piloto ucraniano llamado "Fantasma de Kiev" reportero en 2019  
Mar 14, 2022

**FAKE**



Søk.

Faktisk.

«The Ghost of Kyiv»: Myte eller krigshelt?

FANTASMA DE KIEV»: ENTIDADES FICTICIAS PARA CREAR EL MITO DE UN HEROE UCRANIANO

FaktaBaari  
Faktapohjaisen julkisen keskustelun puolesta

saanut Ukrainan sankarilentäjä - Zelenskyi nimellä

in ja Ukrainan välisen hin kuuluva "Kiova" väitetään iniano a ve" oli n Ukrainan