

— REGIONAL COMPARATIVE REPORT

Mapping the Disinformation Ecosystem in Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan

Evidence, Challenges, and Good Practices

MOLDOVA

ARMENIA

AZERBAIJAN



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Executive summary

Disinformation has become one of the most significant challenges affecting democratic governance, social cohesion, public trust, and regional security across the Eastern Partnership region. Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan face distinct political, social, and media environments, yet all three countries are increasingly exposed to complex information manipulation campaigns that exploit digital technologies, social media platforms, geopolitical tensions, and societal vulnerabilities. While the sources, narratives, and objectives of disinformation vary across the region, the common consequences include weakened public confidence in institutions, increased polarization, reduced resilience to crises, and obstacles to democratic development.

This report, *Mapping the Disinformation Ecosystem in Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan: Evidence, Challenges, and Good Practices*, provides a comparative analysis of the evolving disinformation landscape in the three countries. It combines desk research, analysis of national and regional trends, practical observations from study visits and networking meetings in Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the experiences of civil society organizations working to strengthen information integrity and media resilience.

The report begins by defining the concept of disinformation and distinguishing it from misinformation and malinformation. It examines the various forms through which false or manipulated information spreads, including fabricated content, manipulated images and videos, misleading narratives, coordinated influence campaigns, and AI-generated content. Particular attention is given to the role of social media algorithms, anonymous online networks, and emerging technologies that enable the rapid dissemination of misleading information across national borders.

The regional analysis demonstrates that Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan share many structural vulnerabilities. These include declining trust in public institutions, uneven levels of media literacy, fragmented information environments, growing dependence on social media as a primary news source, and increasing exposure to foreign and domestic influence operations. Although each country faces unique political realities, disinformation frequently targets similar themes, such as elections, governance, corruption, national identity, regional conflicts, migration, public health, and relations with international partners. Country profiles provide a detailed overview of the specific characteristics of the disinformation ecosystem in each state. Moldova experiences persistent foreign information influence alongside domestic political disinformation, particularly during electoral periods and

public policy debates. Armenia continues to confront information manipulation linked to regional security issues, post-conflict narratives, and geopolitical competition. Azerbaijan's information environment is shaped by a combination of state-controlled media, restrictions on independent journalism, and narratives connected to national security and regional developments. Despite these differences, all three countries demonstrate increasing exposure to sophisticated online manipulation techniques and coordinated digital campaigns.

A distinctive feature of this report is the inclusion of findings from exchange visits and networking meetings conducted in Armenia and Azerbaijan. These exchanges enabled representatives of civil society organizations, media professionals, researchers, and human rights defenders to share practical experiences, discuss common challenges, and identify opportunities for regional cooperation. Participants highlighted that many organizations face similar constraints, including limited financial resources, insufficient access to digital monitoring technologies, rapidly evolving online threats, and the growing sophistication of artificial intelligence in generating deceptive content. At the same time, the visits revealed strong potential for collaborative initiatives, peer learning, and coordinated responses across borders.

The report also presents a collection of good practices that have demonstrated positive results in strengthening resilience against disinformation. These include comprehensive media literacy education, independent fact-checking initiatives, strategic communication by public institutions, digital literacy training for vulnerable groups, community-based awareness campaigns, cross-sector partnerships, and the use of innovative monitoring tools. Successful initiatives consistently combine preventive education with rapid response mechanisms and sustained cooperation among governments, civil society, academia, independent media, and international partners.

The comparative analysis identifies several overarching findings. First, disinformation increasingly operates across borders, making isolated national responses insufficient. Second, civil society organizations play a critical role in detecting emerging narratives, educating communities, and supporting evidence-based public discourse. Third, digital literacy remains one of the most sustainable long-term investments in societal resilience. Fourth, technological developments—including artificial intelligence, deepfakes, and automated bot networks—require continuous adaptation of monitoring methodologies and policy responses. Finally, durable progress depends on trust-based partnerships between public institutions, independent media, researchers, technology companies, and international organizations.

Based on these findings, the report offers strategic recommendations tailored to Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan while emphasizing opportunities for regional collaboration. The

recommendations call for strengthening national policy frameworks on information integrity; improving transparency of digital platforms; expanding media and digital literacy across formal and non-formal education systems; investing in independent journalism and fact-checking; enhancing institutional capacities for monitoring and early warning; promoting ethical use of artificial intelligence; supporting research and evidence-based policymaking; and developing permanent regional mechanisms for knowledge exchange and coordinated action.

Ultimately, the report concludes that countering disinformation requires more than reactive measures against false information. Building resilient societies depends on fostering critical thinking, protecting independent media, strengthening democratic institutions, encouraging civic participation, and promoting cross-border cooperation. Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan have valuable opportunities to learn from one another's experiences and to develop coordinated approaches that reinforce regional resilience against information manipulation while supporting democratic values, human rights, and informed public participation.

Acronyms

Abbreviation	Full Name
AI	Artificial Intelligence
API	Association of Independent Press (Republic of Moldova)
COP29	29th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
CRDC	Regional Center for Community Development
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DFRLab	Digital Forensic Research Lab
DVV	Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband International (German Adult Education Association – Institute for International Cooperation)
International	
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EDMO	European Digital Media Observatory
EEAS	European External Action Service
EU	European Union
FIP.am	Fact Investigation Platform
GAPMIL	Global Alliance for Partnerships on Media and Information Literacy
GMF TF	German Marshall Fund of the United States – Transatlantic Foundation
IFCN	International Fact-Checking Network
MIC	Media Initiatives Center (Armenia)
MIL	Media and Information Literacy
MILI	Media and Information Literacy Initiative
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OSINT	Open-Source Intelligence
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Introduction

Disinformation has become one of the most significant challenges affecting democratic governance, human rights, and social cohesion across Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. The rapid expansion of digital communication platforms, social media networks, and artificial intelligence technologies has increased both the speed and sophistication with which false or misleading information spreads. Disinformation campaigns exploit political polarization, social vulnerabilities, regional conflicts, and declining trust in public institutions, influencing public opinion and undermining informed democratic participation.

Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan operate within distinct political, social, and security environments, yet they face a number of common challenges related to information manipulation. These include coordinated influence operations, foreign and domestic disinformation campaigns, limited media literacy among parts of the population, increasing use of anonymous online actors, and difficulties in balancing responses to disinformation with the protection of freedom of expression. Civil society organizations (CSOs), independent media, researchers, and fact-checking initiatives have become essential actors in strengthening information resilience and supporting democratic values throughout the region.

Recognizing these shared challenges, the Association for Human Rights Lex XXI (Moldova) implemented a regional cooperation project aimed at strengthening collaboration among civil society organizations from Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. The initiative created opportunities for direct dialogue, exchange of experiences, identification of common challenges, and development of practical strategies to counter disinformation while promoting democracy, media freedom, and human rights.

The project included several complementary activities. Two exchange visits enabled representatives of Moldovan CSOs to meet partner organizations in Armenia and Azerbaijan, allowing participants to explore national contexts, discuss emerging threats, and learn from successful initiatives. Networking meetings provided structured platforms for experts and practitioners to exchange perspectives on democratic resilience, civic participation, and advocacy. Best practice exchange sessions facilitated peer learning by presenting successful examples of media literacy campaigns, fact-checking initiatives, public awareness activities, and community engagement projects. Finally, participants jointly prepared this report to consolidate the knowledge generated throughout the project and provide practical recommendations for future regional cooperation.

The purpose of this report is to map the evolving disinformation ecosystem in Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan by documenting current trends, identifying common and country-specific challenges, and highlighting effective responses developed by civil society organizations and other stakeholders.

More specifically, the report aims to:

- analyze the main characteristics and drivers of disinformation across the three countries;
- identify similarities and differences in the national information environments;
- document lessons learned during the exchange visits, networking meetings, and peer-learning sessions;
- showcase successful initiatives and good practices implemented by civil society organizations;
- formulate practical recommendations for strengthening regional cooperation, media resilience, and democratic participation;
- provide a resource for policymakers, researchers, journalists, donors, and civil society organizations seeking evidence-based approaches to countering disinformation.

Rather than offering a purely academic assessment, the report combines practical experience with comparative analysis to support future collaboration and policy development across the region.

The findings presented in this report are based on a qualitative and comparative methodology that combines knowledge generated through the project activities with additional desk research and analysis of publicly available sources.

The primary sources of information include:

- discussions and observations during the exchange visits to Armenia and Azerbaijan;
- presentations and contributions from participating civil society organizations;
- outcomes of networking meetings involving experts on democracy, human rights, media freedom, and disinformation;
- case studies presented during the best practices exchange sessions.

These primary findings were complemented by:

- analysis of existing reports published by international organizations, research institutions, and independent think tanks;
- review of academic literature on disinformation and information resilience;

-
- examination of national policy documents, media reports, and publicly available fact-checking resources;
 - comparative analysis of regional trends and existing counter-disinformation initiatives.

The report applies a comparative approach, enabling similarities and differences between Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan to be identified while recognizing each country's unique political, legal, and media landscape.

This report focuses on the disinformation ecosystem in Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, with particular attention to the role of civil society organizations, independent media, and regional cooperation in strengthening democratic resilience.

Its scope includes:

- key disinformation narratives and actors;
- major channels through which disinformation is disseminated;
- challenges faced by civil society organizations and independent media;
- existing policy and institutional responses;
- examples of successful initiatives promoting media literacy, fact-checking, civic engagement, and public awareness;
- opportunities for enhanced regional cooperation among CSOs.

While the report seeks to provide a comprehensive overview, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the information environment evolves rapidly, meaning that new narratives, technologies, and influence techniques may emerge after publication. Second, due to differences in political contexts, media systems, and availability of reliable data, the level of publicly accessible information varies across the three countries. Third, the report primarily reflects insights gathered through project activities and available secondary sources rather than large-scale quantitative surveys or long-term monitoring of online information ecosystems.

Despite these limitations, the report offers a robust evidence-based overview of the regional disinformation landscape. By combining comparative analysis with practical experiences shared by civil society organizations from Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, it provides valuable insights for strengthening regional cooperation, improving information resilience, and supporting future initiatives aimed at protecting democratic values and human rights.

Chapter I: Understanding Disinformation

1.1 Definition and Key Concepts

Disinformation has become one of the most significant challenges affecting democratic societies, public trust, and information integrity. The rapid expansion of digital communication platforms has enabled information to spread globally within seconds, creating opportunities for both accurate reporting and deliberate manipulation.

According to internationally recognized definitions, disinformation refers to false or misleading information that is intentionally created and disseminated to deceive people, manipulate public opinion, or achieve political, ideological, or economic objectives. Unlike accidental mistakes, disinformation is characterized by deliberate intent to mislead.

Concept	Definition	Intent to Mislead
Disinformation	False information deliberately created and shared to deceive audiences.	✓ Yes
Misinformation	False or inaccurate information shared without knowing it is false.	✗ No
Malinformation	Genuine information used maliciously to cause harm, often taken out of context or shared without consent.	✓ Yes
Propaganda	Information—true, false, or misleading—designed to influence opinions or behavior for political or ideological purposes.	Usually

Table 1.1 Key Concepts of Disinformation, Misinformation, Malinformation and Propaganda

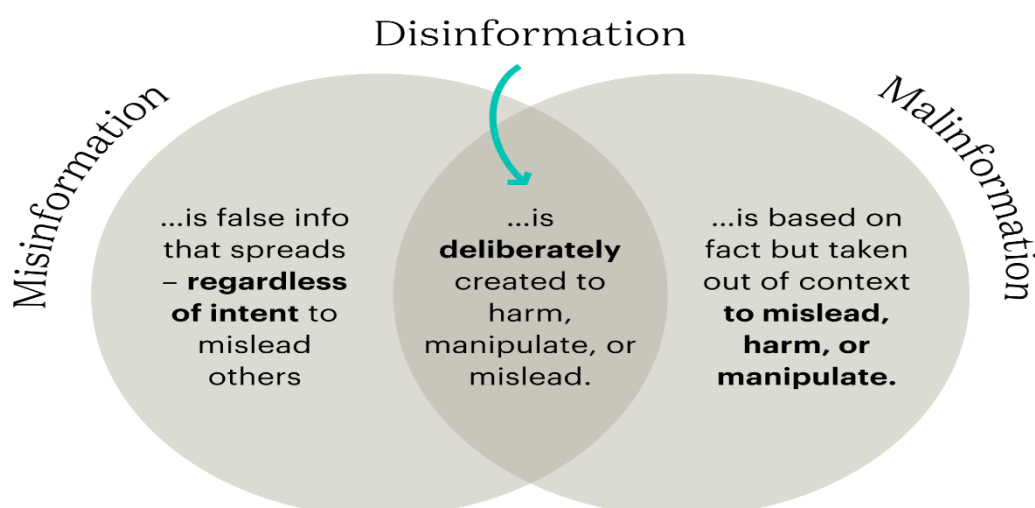


Figure 1.1 Definition of disinformation, misinformation and malinformation

Disinformation campaigns frequently combine factual information with misleading interpretations, emotional language, manipulated visuals, or fabricated evidence. This makes them more convincing than completely false stories.

Modern disinformation is often amplified through:

- Social media algorithms;
- Coordinated bot networks;
- Fake news websites;
- Influencers and anonymous accounts;
- AI-generated images, audio, and videos;
- Messaging applications with encrypted communication.

The objective is rarely to convince everyone that a false claim is true. More commonly, disinformation seeks to create confusion, deepen polarization, reduce trust in institutions, and make citizens uncertain about what information can be trusted.

1.2 Types and Forms of Disinformation

Disinformation appears in many formats and adapts rapidly to new technologies. Understanding its various forms helps individuals recognize manipulation before sharing misleading content.

Type	Description	Example
Fabricated Content	Completely invented stories presented as facts.	Fake reports about election fraud.
Manipulated Content	Genuine photos or videos digitally altered.	Edited images showing events that never occurred.
False Context	Real content presented with misleading explanations.	Old photos shared as if they depict current events.
Impersonation	Fake accounts pretending to represent public institutions or journalists.	Counterfeit government social media pages.
Clickbait	Sensational headlines that exaggerate or misrepresent information.	"Breaking News!" headlines with misleading content.
Deep fakes	AI-generated videos or audio imitating real people.	Fake speeches attributed to political leaders.
Conspiracy Narratives	Claims suggesting hidden groups secretly control events without credible evidence.	False theories about international organizations.

Table 1.2 Types and Forms of Disinformation

Common Channels Used to Spread Disinformation

Channel	Characteristics
Social media platforms	Rapid viral sharing and algorithmic amplification
Messaging applications	Private forwarding with limited moderation
Fake news websites	Mimic legitimate media outlets
Anonymous blogs	Difficult to verify authorship
Video-sharing platforms	Short emotional videos spread quickly
AI-generated content	Increasingly realistic text, images, audio, and video

Table 1.3 Common Channels Used to Spread Disinformation

Typical Characteristics

Disinformation often contains one or more of the following elements:

- Emotional or sensational language;
- Lack of credible sources;
- Manipulated statistics;
- Anonymous "experts";
- Urgent calls to share immediately;
- Selective presentation of facts;
- Appeals to fear, anger, or outrage;
- Repetition across multiple platforms simultaneously.

These techniques exploit psychological biases and encourage rapid sharing before users verify the information.

1.3 Why Disinformation Matters

Disinformation is more than a communication problem—it has significant social, political, economic, and security consequences.

Impact on Democracy

Disinformation undermines informed public debate by distorting facts and creating confusion during elections, referendums, and public consultations. False narratives can reduce confidence in electoral processes, democratic institutions, and independent media.

Impact on Society

Persistent exposure to misleading information contributes to:

- declining trust in government institutions;
- increased social polarization;
- hostility between communities;
- reduced civic participation;
- greater susceptibility to manipulation.

When citizens no longer trust reliable information sources, democratic dialogue becomes increasingly difficult.

Impact on Public Health

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how false information regarding vaccines, treatments, and preventive measures can directly affect public health decisions. Similar challenges continue regarding climate change, food safety, and environmental issues.

Impact on National and Regional Security

Foreign information manipulation campaigns increasingly accompany geopolitical conflicts and hybrid threats. False narratives may seek to:

- undermine confidence in national institutions;
- weaken alliances;
- create internal divisions;
- influence foreign policy debates;
- justify aggression or destabilization efforts.

For countries such as Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, information security has become closely connected to national resilience.

Economic Consequences

Disinformation also generates substantial economic costs by:

- damaging business reputations;
- facilitating online fraud;
- influencing financial markets;
- reducing investor confidence;
- increasing cybersecurity expenditures.

Individual Consequences

On a personal level, disinformation may lead individuals to:

- make poor financial decisions;
- become victims of scams;
- experience anxiety and fear;
- distrust legitimate institutions;
- unintentionally spread false information within their communities.

Building Information Resilience

Addressing disinformation requires a comprehensive approach involving governments, civil society organizations, educational institutions, journalists, technology companies, and citizens. Key elements of resilience include:

- strengthening media and information literacy;
- supporting independent journalism;
- improving fact-checking mechanisms;
- promoting transparency of online platforms;
- encouraging critical thinking;
- enhancing regional cooperation against cross-border disinformation campaigns.

An informed and critically engaged public remains the strongest defense against disinformation.

Chapter II. Disinformation Landscape in the Eastern Partnership Region

2.1. Overview of Disinformation Trends

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) region has become one of the most vulnerable areas to disinformation campaigns, information manipulation, and foreign influence operations. Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan experience different forms of disinformation, yet they share common vulnerabilities: political polarization, dependence on social media as a primary news source, limited media literacy among parts of the population, and geopolitical competition between regional and international actors.

Disinformation in the region has evolved significantly over the past decade. Traditional propaganda disseminated through television and print media has increasingly been replaced by coordinated online campaigns using social media platforms, messaging applications, bot networks, and artificial intelligence-generated content. The spread of misleading information is often amplified during elections, political crises, military conflicts, and major international events.

Moldova

Moldova remains one of the most frequently targeted countries in the EaP region. Disinformation campaigns often focus on:

- European integration and EU accession;
- Elections and democratic institutions;
- Energy dependency and economic relations.



Figure 2.1

Moldovans' use of information

Armenia

Disinformation has become an important challenge in Armenia, especially since the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and during periods of political tension. False or misleading information spreads quickly through social media platforms such as Facebook, Telegram, TikTok, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter), where many people get their daily news. Disinformation often targets political issues, national security, elections, and relations with neighboring countries. It is also used to create fear, confusion, and distrust in public institutions and the media.

One of the main characteristics of disinformation in Armenia is the use of emotionally charged content. Misleading headlines, edited images, fake videos, and false claims are often shared to influence public opinion. During crises, including military escalations or natural disasters, false information spreads even faster because people are looking for quick updates and may share unverified content.

Foreign information influence also plays a role. Experts have identified information campaigns linked to regional geopolitical interests, while domestic political actors sometimes use misleading narratives to gain public support or discredit opponents. These activities contribute to polarization and make it more difficult for citizens to distinguish facts from opinions or propaganda.

Despite these challenges, Armenia has taken important steps to improve resilience against disinformation. Independent media organizations, fact-checking initiatives such as Fact Investigation Platform (FIP.am) and Media.am, civil society organizations, and media literacy programs help citizens verify information and recognize manipulation. International organizations also support projects that strengthen digital literacy, promote quality journalism, and encourage responsible use of social media.

Although disinformation remains a serious issue, growing public awareness and cooperation between journalists, civil society, educators, and international partners are helping to build a more informed and resilient society.

Azerbaijan



Figure 2.2 Azerbaijan's disinformation

Disinformation in Azerbaijan often focuses on topics such as national security, relations with neighboring countries, economic issues, and social problems. Information related to the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia has been a major target of misinformation campaigns. False or unverified reports shared online can increase tensions and spread fear among the public.

Although internet access and digital communication continue to grow, media literacy remains a challenge. Many users share information without checking whether it comes from a reliable source. This increases the speed at which false information spreads across social networks and messaging applications.

Civil society organizations, independent media outlets, and international partners are working to improve media literacy and fact-checking skills. Educational campaigns, public awareness activities, and digital literacy training help citizens learn how to verify information before sharing it. Strengthening these efforts is important for building public trust and increasing society's resilience against disinformation.

Overall, disinformation in Azerbaijan is driven by political, social, and technological factors. Addressing this challenge requires cooperation between government institutions, media organizations, civil society, educators, and citizens to promote accurate information and responsible online behavior.

2.2. Regional Challenges and Common Threats

Country	Main Channels	Typical Narratives	Vulnerable Areas
 Moldova	 Facebook  Telegram  TikTok  television	 EU integration  elections  energy crisis	 Democracy  elections  public trust
 Armenia	 Facebook  Telegram  YouTube	 Security threats  foreign policy  conflict narratives	 National security  elections
 Azerbaijan	 Social media  state-controlled media  messaging apps	 National security  international image  geopolitical conflicts	 Media freedom  civic participation

Figure 2.3 Regional challenges in disinformation

Although Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan have different political and media environments, several common challenges characterize the regional disinformation ecosystem.

The Eastern Partnership countries are frequent targets of foreign information manipulation campaigns. Such operations often seek to:

- Undermine public trust in democratic institutions;
- Influence elections and referenda;
- Polarize societies;
- Weaken support for democratic reforms and international cooperation.

The European External Action Service (EEAS) has documented thousands of cases of disinformation affecting Eastern Partnership countries, particularly around elections, EU integration processes, and security issues.

Social media platforms have become both the primary source of information and the primary channel for misinformation.



Figure 2.4 Key regional risks

Research shows that misinformation increasingly relies on visual content, making detection more difficult for average users.

While public awareness of misinformation is growing, the ability to critically assess information remains uneven.

For example, in Moldova, although 96% of respondents recognize the importance of identifying fake news, many continue to rely heavily on social media as their main information source. Similar challenges exist in Armenia and Azerbaijan, particularly among older populations and rural communities.

2.3. Impact on Democracy, Human Rights, and Social Cohesion

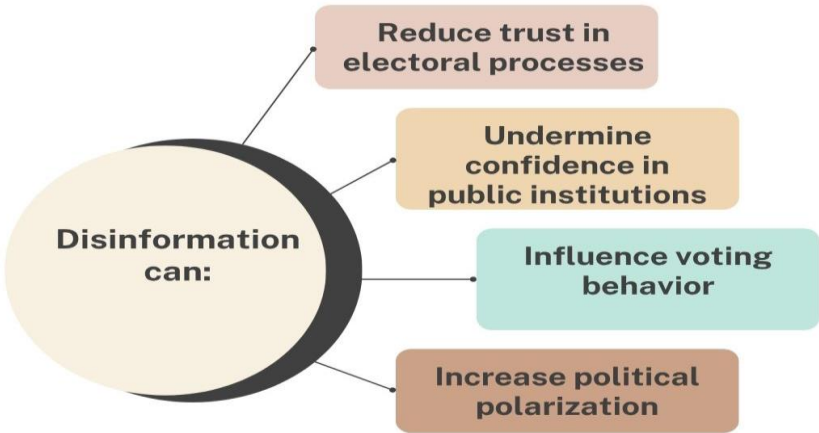


Figure 2.5 Impact of disinformation

Disinformation is not merely an information problem; it has profound implications for democratic governance, human rights protection, and social stability.

Impact on Democracy

Moldova's elections and constitutional referendum debates, for example, have repeatedly been accompanied by disinformation narratives questioning electoral legitimacy and democratic institutions. Similar patterns have been observed during Armenian electoral campaigns.

Institution	Moldova	Armenia	Azerbaijan
Elections	High	High	High
Parliament	High	Medium	Medium
Judiciary	Medium	Medium	Medium
Media	High	High	High
Civil Society	High	Medium	High

Table 2.1 Democratic Institutions Most Affected by Disinformation

Impact on Human Rights

DISINFORMATION CONTRIBUTES TO:

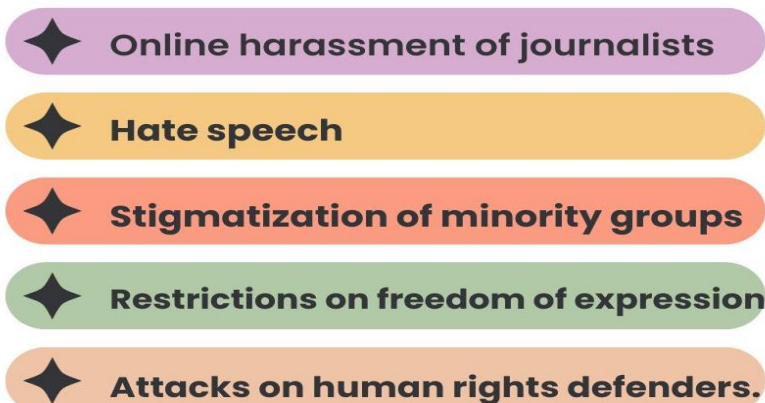


Figure 2.6 Disinformation contribution

Independent media organizations and civil society actors are often among the first targets of coordinated disinformation campaigns. Reduced media pluralism can further weaken citizens' ability to access accurate information.

Impact on Social Cohesion

One of the most damaging effects of disinformation is the erosion of social trust.

Disinformation campaigns frequently exploit:

- Ethnic divisions;
- Linguistic differences;
- Political identities;
- Historical grievances;
- Religious and cultural sensitivities.

As a result, societies become increasingly polarized, making constructive dialogue and democratic participation more difficult. Research demonstrates that disinformation can alter citizens' perceptions of reality, reduce trust in institutions, and weaken social resilience.

CHAIN OF DISINFORMATION IMPACT

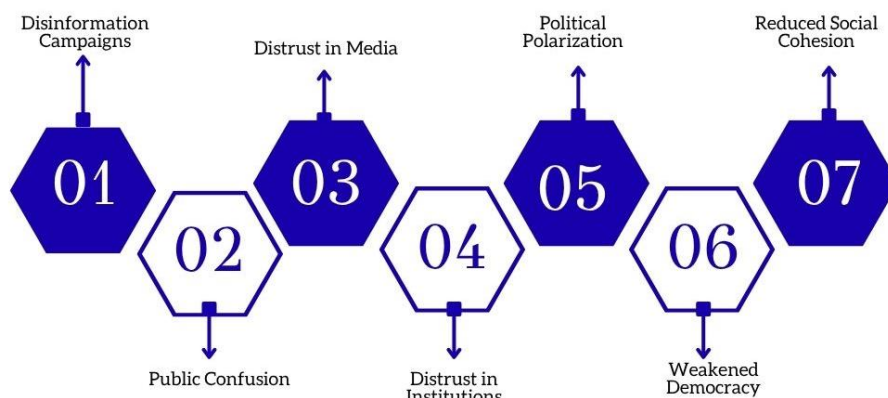


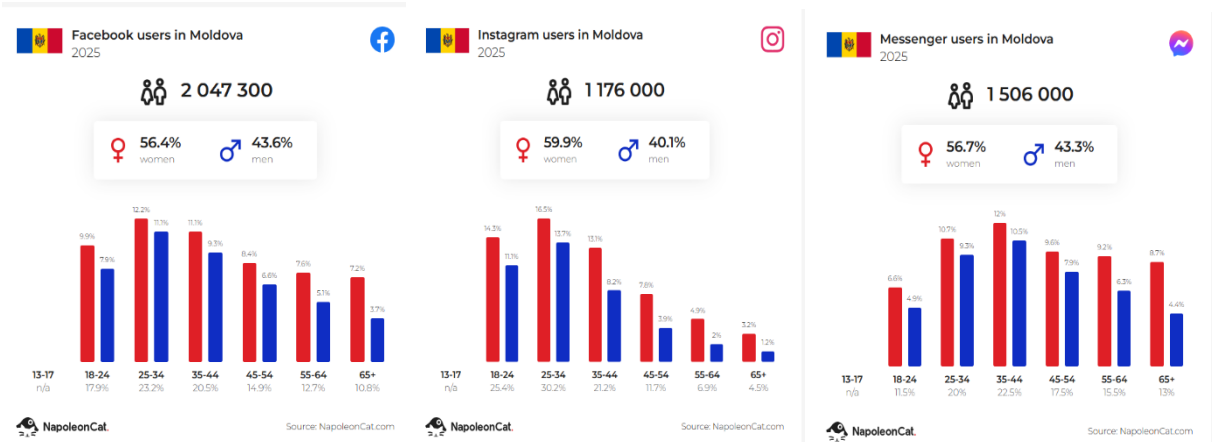
Figure 2.7 Disinformation impact

Conclusion

The disinformation landscape in Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan reflects broader trends across the Eastern Partnership region. While the specific narratives vary according to national contexts, common challenges include foreign information manipulation, the dominance of social media platforms, limited media literacy, and conflict-related information warfare. The consequences extend beyond the information sphere, affecting democratic governance, human rights protection, and social cohesion. Strengthening media literacy, supporting independent journalism, enhancing fact-checking capacities, and promoting regional cooperation are therefore essential components of building societal resilience against disinformation.

Chapter III. Country Profiles

3.1. Moldova



The Republic of Moldova remains one of the most exposed countries in Eastern Europe to foreign information manipulation and disinformation campaigns. Its geopolitical position between the European Union and Russia, combined with electoral processes and societal polarization, has created fertile ground for coordinated influence operations.

According to recent monitoring reports, Telegram, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and several affiliated news portals constitute the primary channels for the dissemination of misleading information.

Narrative	Description	Primary Target
Moldova will lose its sovereignty in the EU	Claims that EU integration will eliminate Moldova's independence	EU accession process
NATO will drag Moldova into war	Narratives portraying cooperation with NATO as a direct military threat	Security policy
Government censorship and dictatorship	Claims that authorities suppress opposition voices	Democratic institutions
Traditional values are under threat	Disinformation linking European integration with cultural decline	Social cohesion
Economic collapse due to the West	Claims that EU-oriented reforms worsen living standards	Public trust in reforms
Elections are manipulated by foreign actors	Narratives undermining confidence in democratic processes	Electoral integrity

Table 3.1 Main Disinformation Narratives in Moldova

Monitoring organizations reported that anti-EU, anti-government, and anti-NATO narratives consistently dominated disinformation ecosystems throughout 2024–2025. These messages often portrayed European integration as a threat to national identity and economic well-being.

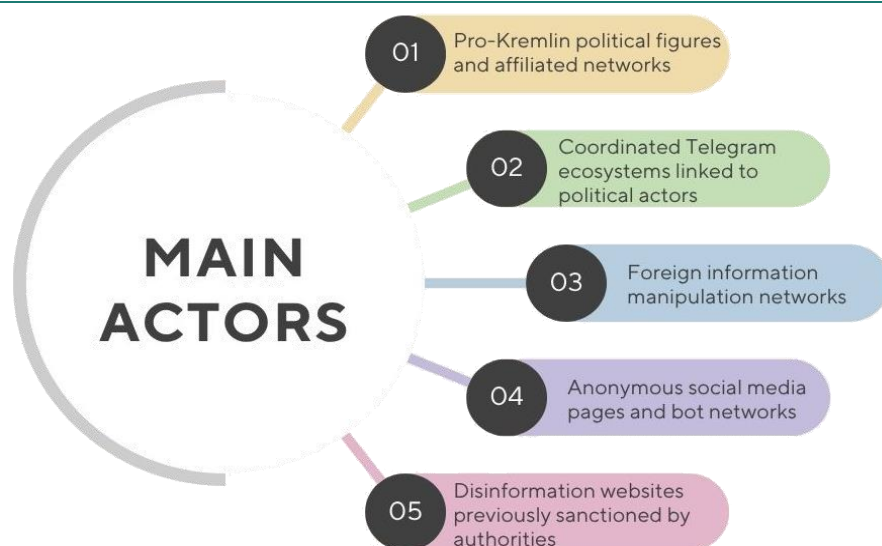


Figure 3.1 Main actors in Moldova

Platform	Level of Use	Typical Content
Telegram	Very High	Political propaganda, conspiracy theories
Facebook	High	Coordinated comments, misinformation campaigns
TikTok	High	Short emotional videos and manipulated content
YouTube	Medium-High	Long-form political commentary
News Websites	Medium	Narrative amplification

Table 3.2 Main Communication Channels in Moldova

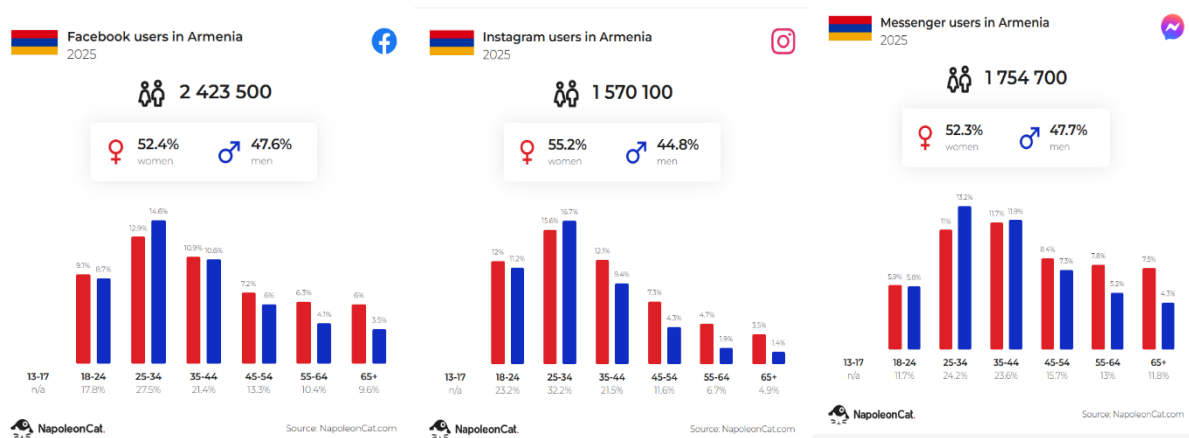
Research identified coordinated Telegram networks sharing identical content simultaneously, indicating centralized management. Several investigations documented thousands of fake accounts amplifying anti-government and anti-EU messaging across Facebook and Telegram.

Initiative	Lead Organization	Objective
StopFals.md	Independent fact-checkers	Debunk false claims
Media Literacy Programs	Civil society organizations	Improve critical thinking
Strategic Communication Units	Government institutions	Rapid response to disinformation
Electoral Monitoring	National and international observers	Protect election integrity
Platform Cooperation	Meta, Google, TikTok	Removal of fake accounts

Table 3.3 Current Responses and Initiatives in Moldova

Notable achievements include the removal of coordinated fake account networks before elections and increased cooperation between technology platforms and Moldovan authorities. Fact-checking organizations have significantly expanded public awareness efforts.

3.2. Armenia



<https://stats.napoleoncat.com/social-media-users-in-armenia/2025/>

Armenia's information environment has undergone substantial transformation following the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war and subsequent regional security developments. The country's complex geopolitical relations have made information manipulation a persistent challenge.

Studies show that misinformation and disinformation are predominantly disseminated through social media platforms, online media, Telegram channels, and politically affiliated information outlets. The information ecosystem is characterized by both domestic and foreign influence campaigns.

Narrative	Description
Armenia is abandoned by allies	Claims designed to increase public insecurity
Government betrayal narratives	Allegations that leaders deliberately weakened national interests
Anti-Western narratives	Claims that Western cooperation threatens Armenia
Anti-Armenian foreign propaganda	Narratives portraying Armenia as a destabilizing actor
Election manipulation claims	Attempts to undermine democratic institutions
Conspiracy theories around regional conflicts	Misleading information regarding regional security issues

Table 3.4 Main Disinformation Narratives in Armenia

Researchers observed increasing anti-Armenian propaganda on foreign Telegram channels, particularly following shifts in Armenia's foreign policy orientation. Disinformation frequently exploits security concerns and public anxiety regarding regional developments.

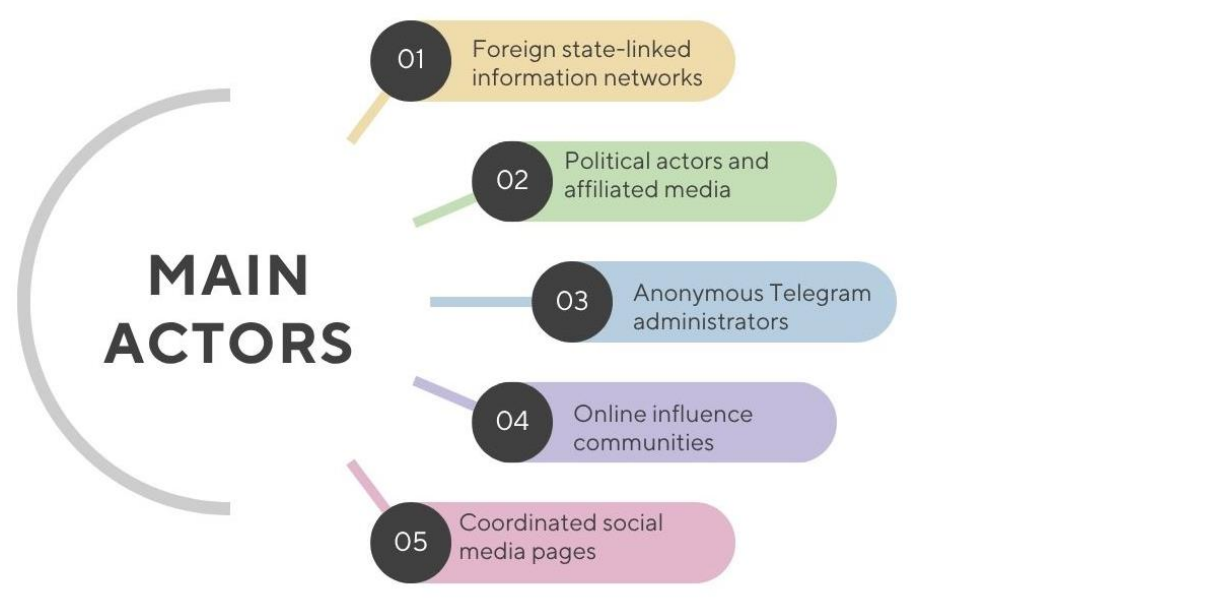


Figure 3.2 Main actors in Armenia

Platform	Influence Level	Main Usage
Facebook	Very High	Political debate and news sharing
Telegram	High	Rapid dissemination of narratives
YouTube	Medium-High	Commentary and political analysis
News Websites	Medium	Narrative reinforcement
TikTok	Growing	Youth-targeted content

Table 3.5 Main Communication Channels in Armenia

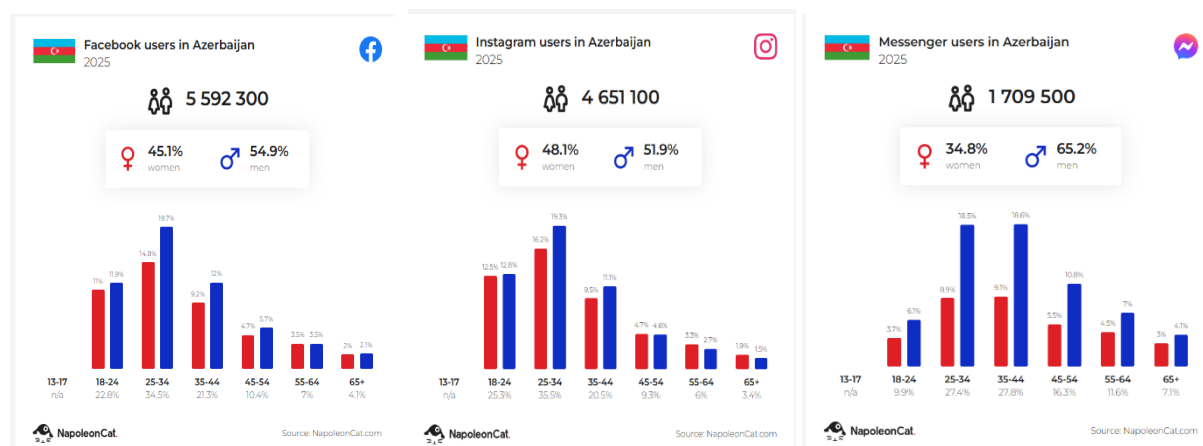
Telegram channels have become particularly influential in spreading political narratives and security-related misinformation, often reproducing content across multiple networks to increase visibility.

Initiative	Organization	Purpose
FIP.am Fact-Checking Platform	Union of Informed Citizens	Verification of public claims
Media Literacy Programs	Freedom of Information Center	Public resilience building
National Action Plan 2024–2026	Government & Civil Society	Strategic response framework
Media Education Projects	NGOs and Universities	Critical media consumption
Independent Journalism Support	International partners	Strengthening information integrity

Table 3.6 Current Responses and Initiatives in Armenia

A major milestone was the adoption of Armenia's Concept and Action Plan for the Struggle against Disinformation (2024–2026), which aims to strengthen institutional coordination and public resilience.

3.3. Azerbaijan



<https://stats.napoleoncat.com/social-media-users-in-azerbaijan/2025/>

Azerbaijan's information environment is shaped by regional geopolitical competition, the aftermath of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and increasing digitalization. Information manipulation often emerges around issues related to national security, international reputation, and regional conflicts.

Recent studies and investigations indicate that social media platforms, particularly X (formerly Twitter), Telegram, Facebook, and emerging AI-enabled networks, are increasingly used to disseminate coordinated narratives.

Narrative	Description
Regional conflict manipulation	Misleading information regarding Armenia-Azerbaijan relations
International reputation attacks	Coordinated online campaigns seeking to shape international perceptions of Azerbaijan; distinct from fact-based international reporting on human rights or media freedom, which is at times mislabeled as such domestically
Foreign interference claims	Information operations linked to geopolitical competition
Climate diplomacy disinformation	Misleading content surrounding COP29
National security misinformation	False narratives exploiting security concerns
Conspiracy narratives	Claims involving hidden geopolitical agendas

Table 3.7 Main Disinformation Narratives in Azerbaijan

During preparations for COP29, researchers identified coordinated online campaigns involving fake accounts and automated amplification designed to influence international discussions related to Azerbaijan.

It is important to distinguish between genuine coordinated disinformation campaigns — involving fake accounts, bot networks, and inauthentic amplification — and fact-based reporting by international media on human rights, media freedom, or civil society conditions in Azerbaijan. Categorizing critical but accurate reporting as “disinformation” solely because it is unfavorable to the government risks conflating two fundamentally different phenomena and undermines the report's analytical framework.

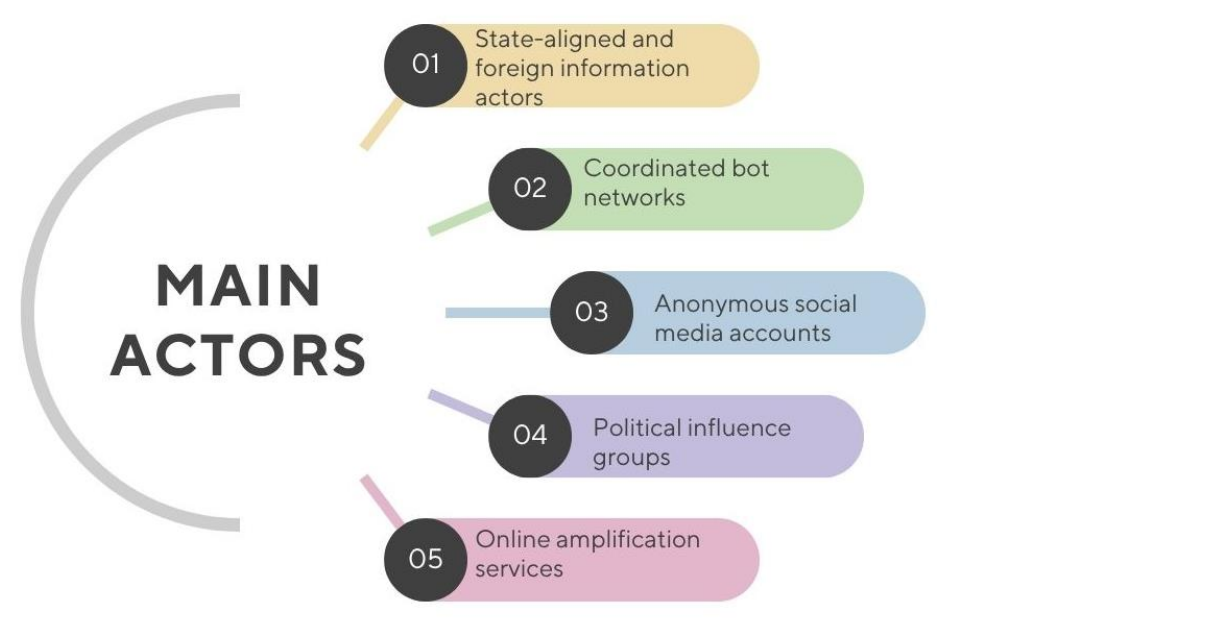


Figure 3.3 Main actors in Azerbaijan

Platform	Importance	Typical Content
X (Twitter)	Medium	International narrative shaping
Telegram	High	Political information sharing
Facebook	High	Public discourse amplification
YouTube	High	Commentary and opinion content
News Portals	Very High	Narrative dissemination

Table 3.8 Main Communication Channels in Azerbaijan

Investigations into COP29-related information campaigns identified networks of fake accounts operating across multiple languages and targeting international audiences.

Initiative	Lead Actors	Objective
Media Development Programs	Government agencies	Improve media resilience
Digital Literacy Campaigns	Civil society organizations	Increase public awareness
Hybrid Threat Monitoring	State institutions	Detect coordinated campaigns

Initiative	Lead Actors	Objective
International Cooperation	Regional and global partners	Exchange best practices
Social Media Monitoring	Public and private stakeholders	Identify manipulation networks

Table 3.9 Current Responses and Initiatives in Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan has increasingly emphasized monitoring hybrid threats and online influence campaigns, particularly during major international events such as COP29. Authorities and partner organizations have highlighted the importance of detecting bot networks and coordinated manipulation activities.

Chapter IV. Exchange Visits and Networking Meetings in Azerbaijan and Armenia

4.1 Objectives and Approach

The exchange visits to Azerbaijan and Armenia represented a key component of the project's regional cooperation strategy. The primary objective was to strengthen partnerships between civil society organizations (CSOs), facilitate the exchange of good practices, and explore innovative approaches to community engagement, human rights promotion, youth participation, and democratic governance.

The visits were designed as interactive learning experiences, combining study visits, networking meetings, stakeholder consultations, and thematic workshops. Particular attention was given to identifying successful models of civic participation that could be adapted and replicated in Moldova.

The exchanges also contributed to strengthening the people-to-people dimension of regional cooperation promoted within the framework of the Eastern Partnership, which supports collaboration among governments, civil society organizations, educational institutions, and local communities across Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Moldova.

Main Objectives of the Exchange Visits



Figure 4.1 Main objectives of the exchange visits

4.2 Participating Organizations and Stakeholders

As part of the regional initiative aimed at strengthening cooperation among civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Eastern Partnership region, the Association for Human Rights Lex XXI (Moldova) conducted study visits to Armenia and Azerbaijan. These visits created valuable opportunities for knowledge exchange, peer learning, and the development of cross-border partnerships focused on promoting human rights, media literacy, and resilience against disinformation.

In Armenia, the delegation held three study visits and working discussions with local civil society organizations. Meetings were organized with Innobiz Armenia, the School of Local Democracy, and another local NGO that preferred to remain anonymous. Each visit included structured presentations on the organizations' work, highlighting the national context, key challenges faced by civil society, and successful approaches to promoting democratic values, civic participation, media literacy, and protection of human rights. Particular attention was given to the growing impact of online disinformation, the spread of false narratives through social media, and the role of civil society in strengthening public resilience through education, community engagement, and fact-based communication.

In Azerbaijan, the Lex XXI delegation participated in four professional discussions involving four civil society organizations. These meetings explored the evolving media landscape, current challenges related to freedom of expression, digital information integrity, and the increasing sophistication of disinformation campaigns. Participants exchanged practical experiences on monitoring misinformation, supporting independent journalism, promoting media literacy, and engaging citizens in critical thinking initiatives. The discussions also emphasized innovative communication tools and collaborative approaches that can enhance the effectiveness of civil society responses to information manipulation.

Beyond the formal sessions, both country visits included informal networking events, which provided participants with opportunities to establish personal connections, exchange experiences in a less formal environment, and identify areas for future cooperation. These interactions proved particularly valuable for building trust among organizations operating in different political and social contexts while sharing similar objectives of protecting democratic values and strengthening civic resilience.

The study visits produced several important outcomes. First, they strengthened mutual trust and understanding among civil society organizations from Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, creating a stronger regional network of partners committed to addressing common

societal challenges. Second, the discussions enabled participants to identify shared challenges and opportunities in countering disinformation, including the need for stronger media literacy, enhanced fact-checking initiatives, greater public awareness, and improved regional cooperation. Finally, the exchanges laid the foundations for long-term collaborative partnerships, opening possibilities for future joint projects, knowledge-sharing activities, advocacy initiatives, and coordinated regional efforts aimed at promoting human rights, protecting democratic processes, and increasing resilience to disinformation across the Eastern Partnership region.

4.3 Key Discussions and Findings

The study visits conducted by the Association for Human Rights Lex XXI to Armenia and Azerbaijan provided a valuable platform for exchanging knowledge, sharing practical experiences, and identifying common approaches to addressing the growing challenge of disinformation in the Eastern Partnership region. During the mission, the delegation held three discussions in Armenia and four discussions in Azerbaijan with representatives of civil society organizations, media experts, researchers, journalists, and institutions engaged in promoting information integrity and democratic resilience.

A central topic across all discussions was the increasing sophistication of disinformation campaigns and their impact on public trust, democratic participation, and social cohesion. Participants from all three countries emphasized that false and manipulated information spreads rapidly through social media platforms, anonymous online accounts, coordinated bot networks, and AI-generated content. Although the specific narratives vary according to national contexts, many disinformation campaigns exploit similar vulnerabilities, including political polarization, low levels of media literacy, and declining public confidence in traditional information sources.

The discussions in Armenia highlighted the importance of strengthening media literacy education, expanding independent fact-checking initiatives, and fostering closer cooperation between civil society organizations and educational institutions. Participants shared successful examples of community-based awareness campaigns and digital literacy programs targeting young people, educators, and vulnerable populations. Particular attention was given to the need for proactive communication strategies that empower citizens to critically evaluate online content before sharing it.

During the four meetings held in Azerbaijan, discussions focused on innovative approaches to digital resilience, public awareness campaigns, and the role of civil society in promoting responsible information consumption. Experts presented practical examples of monitoring online information environments, identifying coordinated disinformation activities,

and engaging local communities through educational initiatives. Participants stressed that combating disinformation requires not only technical solutions but also sustained public engagement, transparent communication, and collaboration among governmental institutions, independent media, academia, and civil society.

One of the most significant outcomes of the study visits was the identification of common regional challenges. Despite differences in political and media environments, organizations in Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan face similar obstacles, including limited financial resources, rapidly evolving digital threats, insufficient cross-border information exchange, and the increasing use of artificial intelligence to generate misleading content. Participants agreed that disinformation should be addressed as a regional challenge requiring coordinated responses rather than isolated national efforts.

The visits also revealed numerous opportunities for cooperation. All participating organizations expressed strong interest in establishing sustainable partnerships focused on exchanging expertise, developing joint educational materials, organizing regional capacity-building activities, and sharing methodologies for monitoring and countering disinformation. Participants emphasized that collaborative initiatives can significantly strengthen the resilience of civil society organizations by facilitating access to good practices, research findings, and innovative digital tools.

Several case studies presented during the discussions demonstrated the effectiveness of community-based media literacy campaigns, independent fact-checking networks, and rapid response mechanisms for identifying false information during periods of heightened public interest. These experiences illustrated that combining technological tools with civic education produces more sustainable results than relying solely on content moderation or technical interventions.

Based on the discussions, participants developed several joint recommendations for future advocacy. These include promoting comprehensive media literacy policies at national and regional levels; supporting independent journalism and fact-checking organizations; increasing cooperation among civil society organizations across the Eastern Partnership region; encouraging greater transparency from digital platforms regarding algorithmic content distribution; and investing in research on emerging forms of AI-generated disinformation.

Finally, the study visits laid the foundations for long-term collaborative partnerships between organizations from Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Participants agreed to continue exchanging expertise, jointly participate in regional initiatives, explore opportunities for collaborative research and advocacy, and develop future projects aimed at strengthening democratic resilience against disinformation. The shared commitment demonstrated throughout

the visits confirmed that regional cooperation remains one of the most effective approaches for protecting information integrity and building more resilient, informed, and engaged societies.

4.4 Cross-Country Learning Experiences

Despite differences in political, legal, and media environments, participants identified several common challenges affecting all three countries. The rapid spread of false and misleading information through social media platforms, increasing use of artificial intelligence to generate manipulated content, coordinated online influence campaigns, declining public trust in traditional media, and insufficient digital literacy among vulnerable groups were consistently highlighted as major concerns. Participants also noted that disinformation increasingly targets democratic institutions, electoral processes, public health, and social cohesion, making regional cooperation essential.

A key lesson learned from the Armenian experience was the importance of investing in media literacy and community-based resilience. Discussions demonstrated that long-term educational initiatives involving schools, youth organizations, journalists, and local communities contribute significantly to strengthening citizens' ability to critically evaluate online information. Armenian organizations also emphasized the value of partnerships between civil society and independent media in rapidly identifying and countering false narratives while maintaining public confidence through transparent communication.

The discussions in Azerbaijan highlighted the importance of technological innovation and institutional cooperation in combating disinformation. Participants presented practical examples of using digital monitoring tools, fact-checking methodologies, and strategic communication techniques to identify emerging disinformation campaigns. The exchange illustrated that technology alone is insufficient without trained professionals, ethical standards, and coordinated cooperation among civil society organizations, researchers, media professionals, and public institutions.

Across both countries, participants agreed that fact-checking initiatives are most effective when combined with public awareness campaigns, digital literacy education, and proactive communication rather than reactive responses alone. Another shared lesson was that combating disinformation requires a whole-of-society approach involving government institutions, civil society, academia, journalists, educators, technology experts, and local communities. Building trust with citizens remains one of the strongest defenses against manipulation.

The study visits also demonstrated significant opportunities for regional cooperation among Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Organizations expressed strong interest in exchanging methodologies, educational materials, research findings, and practical tools for monitoring online information ecosystems. The visits laid the foundations for long-term collaborative partnerships focused on capacity building, joint awareness campaigns, knowledge exchange, and coordinated responses to emerging regional disinformation trends. Participants recognized that many influence operations transcend national borders and therefore require equally coordinated cross-border responses.

Based on the discussions, several recommendations emerged for future cooperation. These include developing joint regional training programs for civil society organizations and journalists; creating a network for regular exchange of information on emerging disinformation narratives; promoting collaborative research and comparative studies on information resilience; expanding media and digital literacy initiatives targeting young people and vulnerable communities; strengthening regional fact-checking cooperation; and advocating jointly for greater transparency and accountability of digital platforms operating in the region. The participating organizations also agreed on the value of organizing periodic regional forums and study exchanges to maintain continuous dialogue and share successful practices.

The experiences gained during the study visits will be further reflected in a series of case studies documenting successful national practices, recommendations for joint advocacy, and practical strategies for future regional cooperation. Overall, the cross-country learning process demonstrated that while each country faces unique circumstances, the underlying challenges posed by disinformation are remarkably similar. By combining local expertise with regional collaboration, civil society organizations can significantly enhance their capacity to promote media literacy, strengthen democratic resilience, and protect citizens from information manipulation. The partnerships established through these exchanges represent an important step toward building a sustainable regional network committed to defending information integrity and supporting democratic values across the Eastern Partnership region.

The exchange visits provided valuable opportunities for mutual learning and reflection.

Lessons Learned from Armenia

Participants observed strong examples of:

- community mobilization initiatives;

- volunteer-driven campaigns;
- youth-led civic projects;
- citizen monitoring mechanisms.

Particular interest was generated by initiatives that engage young people in democratic processes and public consultations.

Lessons Learned from Azerbaijan

Participants explored approaches related to:

- community outreach activities;
- public awareness campaigns;
- youth leadership development;
- cultural dialogue initiatives.

Discussions highlighted the importance of adapting civic engagement methods to local cultural and social contexts. The exchanges demonstrated that while national contexts differ, many challenges and opportunities faced by civil society organizations are remarkably similar across the region.

4.5 Building Regional Partnerships

One of the most significant outcomes of the exchange visits was the establishment of new professional relationships and regional partnerships.

Discussions with partner organizations highlighted numerous opportunities for cooperation beyond the duration of the study visits. Participants agreed on the importance of maintaining regular communication to exchange experiences, methodologies, and practical tools for monitoring and responding to disinformation. Particular interest was expressed in collaborating on media literacy initiatives, fact-checking methodologies, civic education campaigns, and research related to information integrity and online manipulation. The exchange also encouraged dialogue on innovative approaches for engaging youth, local communities, journalists, educators, and public institutions in strengthening societal resilience against false and manipulative information.

An equally valuable outcome was the opportunity to learn directly from successful practices implemented by partner organizations. The Armenian and Azerbaijani experiences provided practical examples of community outreach initiatives, educational campaigns, digital literacy programs, and collaborative mechanisms between civil society and media professionals. These case studies offered valuable insights that can be adapted to the Moldovan context while respecting national specificities. At the same time, Lex XXI shared its own

experience in civic participation, human rights advocacy, and community engagement, creating a balanced exchange of expertise that benefited all participants.

The study visits also laid the groundwork for long-term institutional cooperation. Partners expressed their willingness to continue collaboration through joint project development, participation in regional forums and conferences, exchange of experts, peer-learning activities, and collaborative research. Several organizations identified opportunities to prepare common grant applications under regional and international funding programs addressing democratic governance, media resilience, civic participation, and digital security.

The newly established professional relationships extend beyond individual contacts and represent the beginning of a broader regional cooperation framework. Future collaboration is expected to include the preparation of comparative case studies on disinformation trends, development of practical recommendations for policymakers, joint advocacy initiatives promoting transparent information ecosystems, and coordinated awareness campaigns aimed at increasing public resilience to manipulation. Regular online meetings, exchange visits, and thematic workshops were also identified as practical mechanisms for maintaining active cooperation.

Priority Areas for Cooperation



Figure 4.2 Priority areas for cooperation

Overall, the study visits successfully transformed short-term knowledge exchanges into meaningful and sustainable partnerships. By fostering trust, strengthening professional networks, and identifying common priorities, the initiative created favorable conditions for continued regional cooperation among civil society organizations in Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. These partnerships will contribute not only to improving national responses to disinformation but also to building a stronger regional community capable of jointly addressing emerging information threats, promoting democratic values, and supporting evidence-based public discourse across the Eastern Partnership region. The meetings demonstrated the value of regional dialogue in building trust, fostering cooperation, and creating opportunities for future joint actions. The exchanges contributed to strengthening connections among civil society actors from Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, laying the foundation for sustainable regional cooperation.

Chapter V. Best Practices in Countering Disinformation

5.1. Introduction

Disinformation has become one of the most significant challenges facing democratic societies, public institutions, and citizens worldwide. The rapid growth of social media platforms, artificial intelligence, and digital communication channels has increased both the speed and scale at which false information spreads. According to UNESCO, 56% of internet users rely on social media as a primary source of information, while 85% of citizens' express concern about the impact of online disinformation. Additionally, two-thirds of digital content creators admit that they do not systematically verify information before sharing it online.

In response, governments, civil society organizations, educational institutions, media outlets, and technology companies have developed innovative approaches to strengthen societal resilience against disinformation. This chapter examines some of the most effective and replicable practices currently used around the world.

5.2. Civil Society Initiatives

Civil society organizations (CSOs) play a critical role in countering disinformation by monitoring information environments, promoting transparency, conducting fact-checking activities, and educating citizens.

Successful CSO-led initiatives share several common characteristics:

- Independence from political influence;
- Strong community presence;
- Collaboration with journalists and researchers;
- Focus on public education rather than censorship.

One notable example is the work of the European Digital Media Observatory, which brings together fact-checkers, researchers, media literacy experts, and civil society actors across Europe to identify and counter disinformation campaigns. During the 2024 European elections, EDMO established a dedicated task force to detect and respond rapidly to emerging disinformation threats.

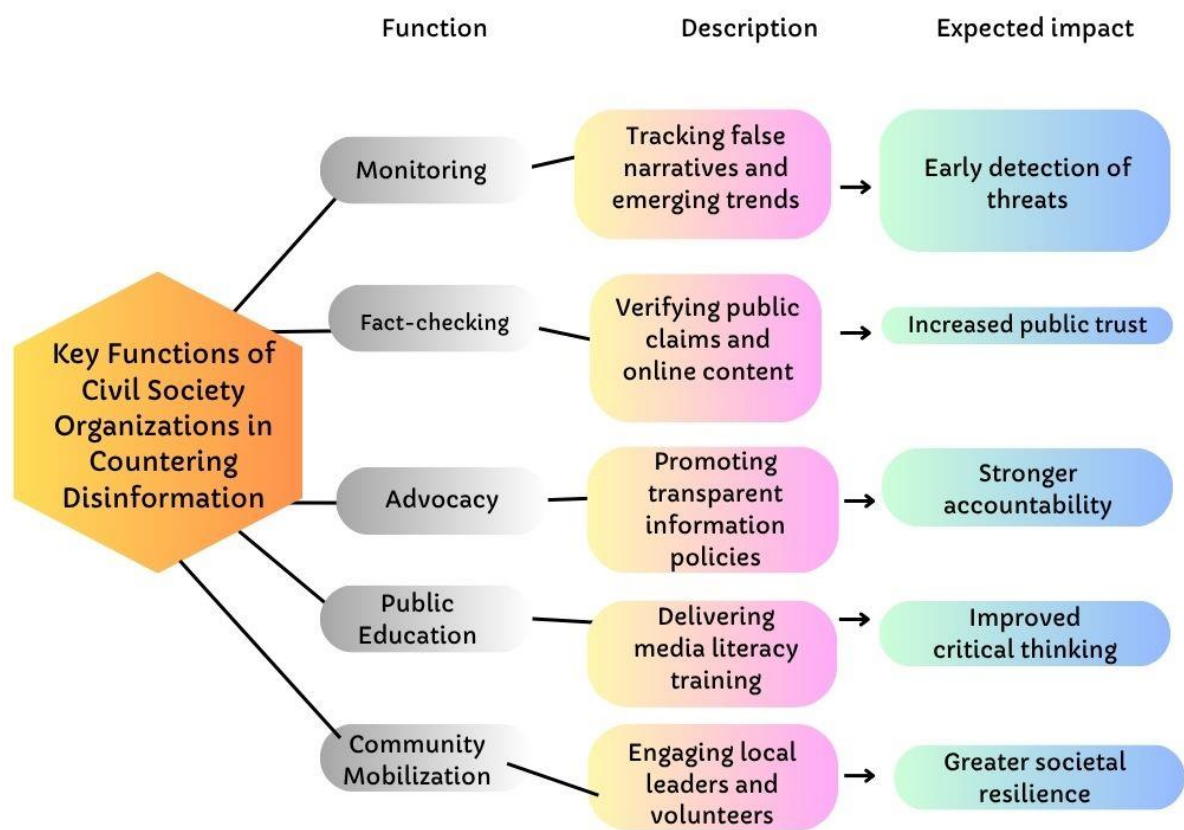


Figure 5.1 Key functions of CSO

5.3. Media Literacy Programs

Media literacy is widely recognized as the most sustainable long-term solution to disinformation.

UNESCO defines Media and Information Literacy (MIL) as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and share information responsibly. UNESCO supported 32 countries in developing national media literacy strategies in 2024 and trained more than 10,500 digital content creators through its "How to Be a Trusted Voice Online" initiative.

Why Media Literacy Works

Rather than simply correcting false information after it spreads, media literacy equips citizens with skills to:

- ✓ Verify sources
- ✓ Identify manipulation techniques
- ✓ Detect emotional manipulation
- ✓ Understand algorithmic influence
- ✓ Evaluate AI-generated content

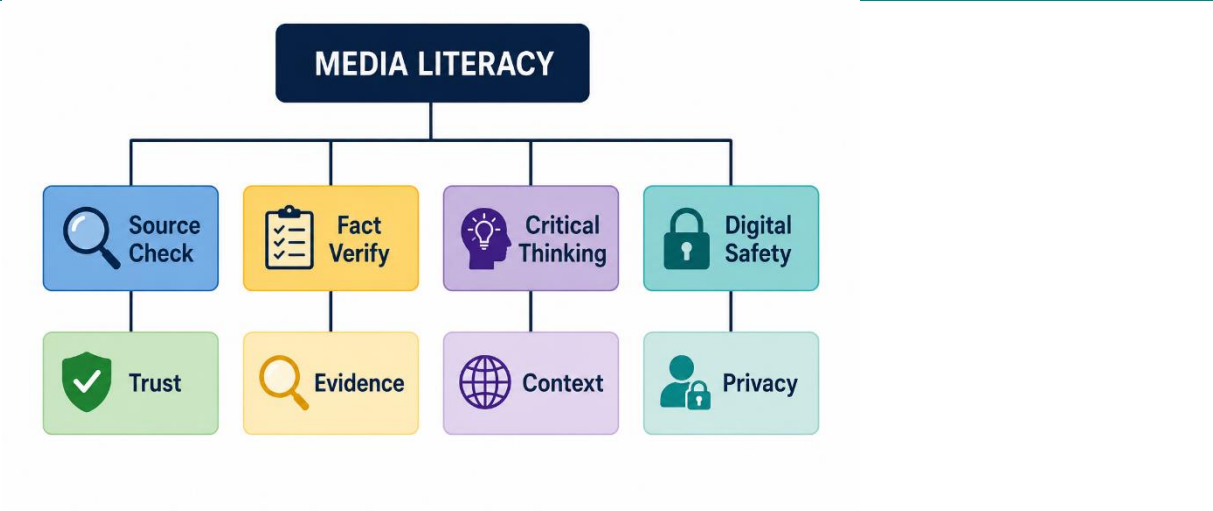


Figure 5.2 Core Components of Media Literacy

Case Study: Youth-Focused Media Literacy Programs

Youth-centered media literacy programs have demonstrated significant success because young people are among the most active social media users. UNESCO reports that approximately 80% of young people use AI-powered digital tools daily, making digital literacy increasingly important.

Interactive approaches such as: Simulation exercises; Online games; Debate clubs; Digital storytelling workshops, have proven more effective than traditional lectures in improving information evaluation skills.

The notable youth-focused media literacy programs in Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, illustrate different approaches to strengthening young people's resilience against misinformation, disinformation, and online manipulation.

Country	Program	Target Group	Main Activities	Sources
Moldova	Heroes of the Internet (Eroii Internetului)	School students, teachers	Digital safety, critical thinking, online responsibility	Ministry of Education
Moldova	Y-MEDIA	Youth, teachers, activists	Fact-checking, media analysis, anti-disinformation campaigns	CRDC
Moldova	MILI (Media and Information Literacy Initiative)	Young people and local communities	Media literacy workshops, training, mentorship, intergenerational learning	API Moldova
Armenia	Media Literacy Program (Media Initiatives Center)	School pupils, university students, teachers	Media literacy curriculum, teacher training, educational games	Media Initiatives Center

Country	Program	Target Group	Main Activities	Sources
Azerbaijan	MEDIA Volunteers	University students and young professionals	Journalism basics, media literacy, internships	Media Development Agency
Azerbaijan	MEDIAlab	University students	Digital media skills, workshops, innovation in journalism	Media Development Agency
Azerbaijan	InnoMEDIA	Young journalists and students	Digital media, communication, networking, innovation	Media Development Agency

Table 5.1 Youth-Focused Media Literacy Programs in Moldova, Armenia and Azerbaijan

Moldova

1. Heroes of the Internet (Eroii Internetului)

One of Moldova's newest nationwide initiatives is Heroes of the Internet, launched in 2024 by the Ministry of Education and Research together with the International Centre "La Strada". The programme introduces media literacy and digital safety through classroom activities designed primarily for school-age children.

The programme teaches students how to:

- recognize misleading online content;
- protect personal data;
- evaluate online information critically;
- become responsible digital citizens.

An important feature is the preparation of teachers through dedicated training sessions, enabling them to integrate media literacy into everyday teaching rather than treating it as a separate subject. Parents are also involved through family guides that encourage discussions about online safety.

2. Y-MEDIA

The Y-MEDIA project, implemented by the Regional Center for Community Development (CRDC), directly addresses youth vulnerability to misinformation and propaganda.

Unlike traditional classroom programmes, Y-MEDIA combines:

- interactive workshops;
- documentary screenings;
- mentoring;
- practical fact-checking exercises;
- community awareness campaigns.

Participants learn how to verify information sources, recognize manipulation techniques, identify fake news, and understand how algorithms influence information exposure.

The programme also establishes local youth ambassadors who continue promoting media literacy in their own communities.

3. Media and Information Literacy Initiative (MILI)

The MILI for Moldova project is implemented by DVV International together with the Association of Independent Press (API) and the Youth Media Centre.

Although community-oriented, the initiative strongly engages young people through:

- local media literacy workshops;
- mentor training;
- intergenerational dialogue;
- practical exercises on identifying propaganda and fake news.

The project also develops local media literacy facilitators capable of continuing educational activities after project completion, contributing to long-term community resilience.

Armenia

Media Literacy Programme – Media Initiatives Center (MIC)

The Media Initiatives Center (MIC) has been Armenia's leading media literacy organization for more than two decades and has operated a comprehensive media literacy programme since 2011.

Its activities include:

- integrating media literacy into school curricula;
- developing textbooks and teacher manuals;
- training teachers nationwide;
- organizing workshops for pupils and university students;
- producing educational videos and interactive games;
- promoting critical evaluation of news and social media content.

The programme is closely coordinated with the Ministry of Education and has received international recognition. In 2017, MIC received the UNESCO Global Alliance for Partnerships on Media and Information Literacy (GAPMIL) Grand Prize for its work in advancing media literacy in Armenia.

The Armenian model emphasizes sustainability by embedding media literacy into formal education rather than relying solely on short-term projects.

Azerbaijan

1. MEDIA Volunteers

The MEDIA Volunteers Programme, implemented by the Media Development Agency of Azerbaijan, targets university students and young media enthusiasts interested in journalism and digital communication.

Participants receive training in:

- media literacy;
- journalism fundamentals;
- digital journalism;
- media ethics;
- leadership;
- creative thinking;
- communication skills.

The programme also includes internships at media organizations, providing practical experience alongside theoretical learning.

2. MEDIALab

The MEDIALab Project collaborates with several Azerbaijani universities to improve young people's digital media competencies.

The project organizes:

- seminars;
- workshops;
- networking events;
- masterclasses;
- innovation competitions.

Its primary objective is to prepare future journalists and communication specialists for the evolving digital media environment while strengthening critical understanding of digital media technologies.

3. InnoMEDIA

The InnoMEDIA Project focuses on innovation in journalism and digital communication.

Young participants receive training on:

- digital media opportunities;
- convergence journalism;
- emerging media technologies;
- professional networking;

-
- communication strategies.

The programme emphasizes innovation and digital transformation in the media sector while helping participants adapt to rapidly changing information environments.

Comparative observations

The three countries share the objective of improving young people's resilience against disinformation, but their approaches differ:

- **Moldova** relies primarily on partnerships between government institutions, NGOs, and international organizations, with a strong focus on digital safety, fact-checking, and community outreach.
- **Armenia** has developed one of the region's most institutionalized approaches by integrating media literacy into the formal education system through curriculum development and nationwide teacher training.
- **Azerbaijan** emphasizes professional development and youth engagement within the media sector, offering university-based programs that combine media literacy with journalism, digital communication, and innovation skills. It should be noted that the three programs identified (the MEDIA Volunteers Programme, MEDIAlab, and InnoMEDIA) are government-affiliated or university-led initiatives; independent civil society and media organizations have not been meaningfully involved in their design or implementation, which may limit their reach and credibility among audiences skeptical of state-led communication efforts.

Together, these initiatives demonstrate a growing regional recognition that strengthening media literacy among young people is an essential component of democratic resilience and an effective long-term strategy for countering disinformation.

5.4. Fact-Checking and Verification Mechanisms

Fact-checking serves as the frontline defense against disinformation.

Independent fact-checking organizations verify public statements, social media content, images, videos, and viral narratives using transparent methodologies.

The European Commission considers independent fact-checkers a central pillar of its strategy to combat information manipulation and foreign interference.

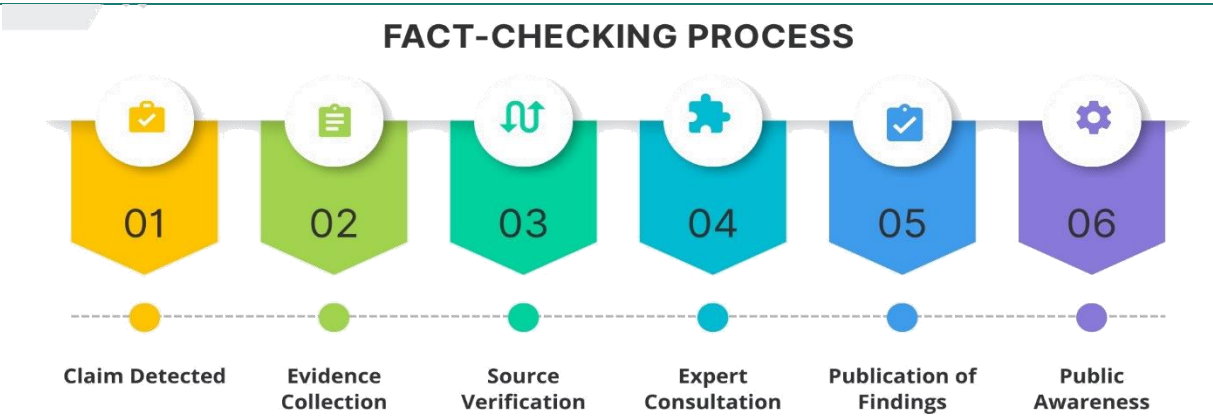


Figure 5.3 Fact-checking process

Technique	Purpose
Reverse Image Search	Detect manipulated or reused images
Geolocation Verification	Confirm event locations
Metadata Analysis	Verify digital content authenticity
Cross-Source Verification	Compare information across multiple sources
AI Detection Tools	Identify synthetic media and deepfakes

Table 5.2 Common Verification Techniques

Research shows that community-based fact-checking systems can significantly reduce the spread of misleading content. Studies of crowd-supported fact-checking initiatives found that misinformation flagged by communities was substantially less likely to go viral than unverified content.

Emerging Challenge: Deep fakes - Artificial intelligence has introduced a new generation of threats through realistic synthetic audio, images, and videos. Deep fakes are increasingly used in political campaigns, public manipulation efforts, and influence operations, requiring advanced detection systems and rapid-response verification mechanisms.

The growing volume of online disinformation has increased the importance of independent fact-checking initiatives and verification mechanisms across the South Caucasus and Moldova. While all three countries face common challenges—including coordinated disinformation campaigns, manipulated visual content, and politically motivated narratives—their institutional responses differ significantly in terms of independence, capacity, and media freedom.

Moldova

Moldova has developed one of the most advanced fact-checking ecosystems in the Eastern Partnership region. The leading initiative is Stopfals.md, launched by the Independent Press Association (API) in 2017 as part of the national STOP FALS! campaign. The platform

investigates false or misleading claims circulating in traditional media, social media, and political discourse while also providing media literacy resources for citizens. Stopfals follows a transparent verification methodology based on the use of primary sources, multiple independent references, evidence documentation, and editorial review. It is also the only Moldovan fact-checking organization that is a signatory of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) Code of Principles.

Examples of verified claims include:

- debunking manipulated videos related to the war in Ukraine;
- verifying false claims regarding Moldova's EU accession process;
- exposing AI-generated images and fabricated social media posts used to influence public opinion.

Armenia

Armenia's fact-checking landscape is led by independent media organizations rather than state institutions. The most prominent initiative is Fact Investigation Platform (FIP.am), operated by Union of Informed Citizens. FIP specializes in verifying statements made by public officials, investigating political claims, and exposing disinformation related to elections, governance, and regional security. During periods of heightened Armenia–Azerbaijan tensions, FIP has played an important role in verifying viral videos, satellite imagery, and military-related claims before publication. International organizations frequently reference FIP's investigations when assessing information integrity in Armenia.

Additional verification efforts are carried out by:

- **Media.am**, which publishes media literacy materials and fact-checking articles;
- **CivilNet**, whose journalists regularly verify official statements and online misinformation using open-source intelligence (OSINT) techniques.

Examples include:

- verification of false reports about troop movements along the Armenia–Azerbaijan border;
- debunking fabricated news websites impersonating legitimate Armenian media;
- verification of manipulated images circulated during regional conflicts.

Azerbaijan

Fact-checking mechanisms in Azerbaijan are comparatively limited due to restrictions on media freedom and the operating environment for independent journalists. Most verification activities are conducted by independent journalists, civil society actors, and Azerbaijani media organizations operating abroad. International organizations—including regional media

monitoring initiatives and international fact-checking networks—often fill gaps by verifying claims related to Azerbaijan.

Independent outlets such as Meydan TV, Abzas Media, and Toplum TV regularly investigate misleading official narratives, verify publicly available data, and analyze disinformation campaigns despite significant political pressure on independent media. Their work often relies on open-source intelligence, official documents, satellite imagery, and international databases to verify public claims.

Examples include:

- verification of misleading information concerning regional security developments;
- investigations into manipulated videos circulated on social media;
- analysis of coordinated online influence campaigns targeting domestic and international audiences.

Comparative Assessment

Although the three countries face similar disinformation threats, their verification capacities differ considerably. Moldova possesses the most institutionalized and internationally recognized fact-checking infrastructure, supported by transparent methodologies and public media literacy initiatives. Armenia relies primarily on independent investigative organizations that combine traditional journalism with digital verification techniques. In Azerbaijan, independent fact-checking exists but operates under substantially more restrictive conditions, making international partnerships and external verification networks particularly important for countering disinformation. Strengthening regional cooperation among fact-checkers, expanding OSINT capabilities, and increasing public media literacy remain common priorities for improving information resilience across all three countries.

5.5. Community Engagement Approaches

Community engagement has become a central element of efforts to strengthen democratic participation, counter disinformation, and build social resilience across Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Although the political and civic environments differ considerably among the three countries, successful initiatives share common characteristics: collaboration between civil society organizations (CSOs), local authorities, independent media, educational institutions, and community members. These approaches emphasize participation, trust-building, media literacy, and locally driven solutions.

Moldova: Participatory Civic Engagement and Media Literacy

In Moldova, community engagement is largely driven by civil society organizations working closely with local communities, municipalities, youth groups, and independent media.

A common approach involves organizing community forums, public consultations, media literacy workshops, citizen journalism initiatives, and civic monitoring activities. These initiatives encourage citizens to participate in local decision-making while improving their ability to recognize misinformation and verify information sources.

For example, the [Council of Europe's media freedom programme in Moldova](#) supports media literacy campaigns, cooperation between journalists and local communities, and the development of a more transparent media environment. Likewise, [Freedom House Moldova programmes](#) promote grassroots advocacy, public awareness campaigns, youth engagement, legal assistance, and collaboration between NGOs and independent media to strengthen democratic participation. These initiatives demonstrate how combining civic participation with media education can increase community resilience against disinformation.

Armenia: Community-Based Media Literacy and Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships

Armenia has increasingly adopted community-centered approaches that integrate media literacy, civic education, and partnerships among civil society organizations, schools, local governments, and citizens. Rather than relying solely on awareness campaigns, many projects empower local organizations to design activities tailored to community needs.

A notable example is the [Advancing Media Literacy through Civil Society Actors in Armenia](#) project implemented by People in Need. The initiative trained 19 local CSOs to conduct media literacy workshops, documentary screenings, youth discussions, and community education sessions, enabling local organizations to become long-term providers of media literacy education. Similarly, [Freedom House Armenia programmes](#) facilitate dialogue among government institutions, journalists, policymakers, civil society, and citizens through research, public consultations, advocacy campaigns, and grassroots initiatives addressing disinformation. These examples illustrate how sustained partnerships help create local ownership of information resilience.

Azerbaijan: Community Capacity Building under a Restricted Civic Environment

Community engagement in Azerbaijan operates within a more constrained civic environment, making locally focused capacity-building initiatives particularly important. International organizations often cooperate with community-based organizations, volunteer networks, and humanitarian actors to strengthen local resilience while avoiding politically sensitive activities.

For instance, EU-supported programmes highlighted in regional assessments include the "Developing Innovation-driven and Sustainable Civil Society" initiative implemented with UNDP, which provided training, coaching, networking opportunities, and small grants to strengthen evidence-based policy dialogue and cooperation between municipalities and civil

society organizations. Another example is the EU-supported project implemented with the Azerbaijan Red Crescent, which focused on strengthening volunteer groups and community capacities to respond to local vulnerabilities through community service delivery and local engagement. These initiatives prioritize practical community problem-solving, volunteer mobilization, and local capacity development.

Common Regional Practices

Despite differences in political context, several community engagement approaches are common across Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan:

- Media and information literacy education, particularly for youth and vulnerable groups.
- Partnerships between CSOs, local authorities, educators, and independent media.
- Community dialogues and public discussions that encourage citizen participation and trust-building.
- Youth leadership and volunteer programmes promoting civic responsibility.
- Grassroots initiatives designed and implemented by local organizations to address community-specific challenges.
- Regional networking and knowledge exchange, allowing organizations to share good practices and strengthen cross-border cooperation.

Recent regional initiatives have also demonstrated the value of collaborative learning. For example, collaboration laboratories brought together grassroots organizations from both Moldova and Armenia using participatory methods such as World Café discussions, networking sessions, and joint project design to establish long-term partnerships and strengthen community engagement capacities.

Overall, while Moldova emphasizes participatory governance and independent media engagement, Armenia focuses on locally led media literacy and multi-stakeholder cooperation, and Azerbaijan prioritizes community capacity-building and volunteer engagement within existing civic constraints. Together, these experiences demonstrate that sustainable community engagement depends on trust, local ownership, continuous civic education, and strong partnerships among public institutions, civil society, and community members.

5.6. Digital Tools and Innovative Solutions

Digital technologies have become one of the most effective instruments for identifying, monitoring, and countering disinformation in Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. The civil society organizations, independent media, researchers, and technology experts increasingly rely on digital tools to verify information, monitor social media, detect coordinated influence campaigns, and improve citizens' media literacy. Although the level of digital freedom differs

significantly among the three countries, innovative technological solutions have become essential components of information resilience.

Moldova has developed several practical digital initiatives focused on fact-checking and public awareness. One of the most recognized platforms is [STOP FALS!](#), managed by the Independent Press Association. The platform combines fact-checking articles with interactive educational resources such as the "ABC-ul consumatorului de media" and "Instrumente anti-fals", helping citizens verify suspicious information, recognize manipulation techniques, and identify online scams. It also regularly publishes analyses of deepfakes, AI-generated content, and coordinated disinformation campaigns, making it an important digital hub for media literacy in Moldova.

Another innovative approach in Moldova is the growing use of Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) techniques by investigative journalists and civil society organizations. These include reverse image search, metadata verification, satellite imagery analysis, and geolocation tools to authenticate photos and videos circulating on social media. Organizations also monitor Telegram channels, Facebook pages, and bot networks to identify coordinated influence operations targeting elections, security issues, and European integration.

Armenia has significantly expanded its digital fact-checking ecosystem during recent years. The independent platform [FIP.am \(Fact Investigation Platform\)](#), formerly Sut.am, specializes in investigating misleading political statements, manipulated media, and false narratives. Journalists combine traditional verification methods with digital investigative tools, including image forensics, reverse image search, archive searches, and geolocation analysis. These methods have proven particularly valuable in verifying information related to regional security and conflict reporting.

Another important Armenian initiative is [Media.am](#), which regularly publishes guides on digital verification techniques, fact-checking methodologies, and the use of OSINT tools in journalism. The platform also promotes collaboration among Armenian fact-checkers to detect cross-border disinformation campaigns, including cloned websites ("Doppelgänger" operations), coordinated social media manipulation, and AI-generated misinformation.

In **Azerbaijan**, despite a more restrictive media environment, several digital initiatives focus on improving information verification and public awareness. The platform [FactChecking.az](#) publishes fact-checking articles covering health misinformation, artificial intelligence, deepfakes, and international news. The website increasingly addresses technological threats such as synthetic media, manipulated videos, and AI-generated images, reflecting the growing importance of digital verification in the country.

Across all three countries, journalists and civil society organizations increasingly use globally available digital verification tools, including Google Reverse Image Search, TinEye, InVID-WeVerify, Google Fact Check Explorer, CrowdTangle (where available), and geolocation platforms such as Google Earth and OpenStreetMap. Artificial intelligence is also beginning to support fact-checkers by assisting with content classification, detecting coordinated online behavior, identifying manipulated images, and prioritizing claims for verification. Although AI cannot replace human verification, it substantially improves the speed and scale of fact-checking operations. Research on automated fact-checking systems highlights the growing role of AI-assisted verification technologies in supporting journalists and reducing the spread of false information.

Overall, Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan demonstrate that digital innovation has become a critical element of resilience against disinformation. While national contexts differ, common trends include expanding fact-checking platforms, greater use of OSINT techniques, AI-assisted verification, media literacy portals, and collaborative digital networks. Continued investment in these technologies, combined with regional cooperation and public digital literacy, will be essential for strengthening democratic resilience against increasingly sophisticated information manipulation.

Chapter VI. Key Findings and Lessons Learned

Although Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan differ significantly in their political systems, levels of media freedom, and geopolitical environments, they face a number of common challenges in combating disinformation and information manipulation. Digital technologies, social media platforms, and the growing use of artificial intelligence have transformed the information landscape across the South Caucasus and Eastern Europe, making all three countries vulnerable to coordinated influence operations, foreign interference, and domestic misinformation campaigns. While the sources and intensity of disinformation vary, several trends are evident across the region.

6.1. Regional trends in disinformation

a. Rapid Spread of False Information Through Social Media

One of the most significant common challenges is the increasing dominance of social media as the primary source of news. Platforms such as Facebook, Telegram, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) allow false information to spread much faster than traditional media can verify or correct it.

In Moldova, according to the 2025 Council of Europe and Audiovisual Council study "Media Literacy in the Republic of Moldova":

- 64% of Moldovans receive news daily through social media;
- 70% consider social media to be the main source of disinformation;
- 96% believe that distinguishing factual information from fake news is important.

These figures illustrate both the dependence on online platforms and the growing awareness of disinformation risks.

In Armenia, social media became one of the principal sources of information after the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Studies by the Media Initiatives Center and international observers have shown that Facebook and Telegram channels regularly circulate unverified military information, manipulated videos, and emotionally charged narratives during periods of political tension.

In Azerbaijan, despite tighter state control over traditional media, Telegram channels, YouTube, TikTok, and messaging applications remain important sources of information, particularly for younger audiences. Independent researchers have documented the rapid spread of unverified content during regional security events, especially relating to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The algorithms used by major social media platforms often prioritize highly emotional, controversial, or sensational content, regardless of its accuracy. This creates favorable conditions for disinformation campaigns that exploit fear, uncertainty, or political polarization.

b. Coordinated Influence Campaigns and Foreign Information Operations

All three countries are exposed to coordinated influence operations originating both domestically and from external actors.

Moldova has repeatedly been identified by the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the EUvsDisinfo project as a target of pro-Kremlin disinformation campaigns. Common narratives include:

- questioning Moldova's European integration;
- portraying NATO as a military threat;
- spreading false claims regarding refugees, elections, and energy security;
- undermining trust in democratic institutions.

During the 2024 presidential election period and preparations for the constitutional referendum on European integration, Moldovan authorities reported extensive online manipulation campaigns involving fake accounts, coordinated networks, and misleading political advertising.

Armenia experiences information operations linked both to regional conflicts and domestic political competition. During and after the 2020 and 2023 developments in Nagorno-Karabakh, numerous coordinated campaigns promoted contradictory narratives concerning military events, humanitarian issues, and peace negotiations.

Azerbaijan similarly experiences highly polarized information campaigns surrounding regional security issues. Researchers from organizations such as the Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab) have documented coordinated online behavior amplifying official narratives while simultaneously attacking independent journalists and critics.

These influence operations often employ identical techniques:

- coordinated posting;
- fake social media profiles;
- bot networks;
- anonymous Telegram channels;
- manipulated images and videos;
- emotionally charged messaging.

c. Growing Use of Artificial Intelligence in Disinformation

Artificial intelligence is becoming an increasingly important component of modern disinformation campaigns.

Across Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, researchers have observed increasing use of:

- AI-generated images;
- synthetic voices;
- deepfake videos;
- automatically generated political messages;
- AI-assisted translation of propaganda into multiple languages.

Generative AI significantly lowers the cost of producing convincing fake content. Political actors and influence networks can now create large volumes of realistic-looking material within minutes.

Although verified large-scale AI-driven influence operations remain relatively limited in the region compared to global examples, experts from the OECD, UNESCO, and the European Union warn that Eastern Partnership countries are particularly vulnerable because of limited regulatory frameworks and insufficient technical detection capacity.

d. Anonymous Accounts and Bot Networks

Anonymous online accounts remain one of the most persistent challenges throughout the region.

Bot networks are commonly used to:

- artificially amplify political messages;
- attack journalists;
- spread conspiracy theories;
- manipulate trending topics;
- create an illusion of public consensus.

Investigations conducted by organizations such as EUvsDisinfo, DFRLab, and local fact-checking initiatives have identified repeated patterns of coordinated inauthentic behavior targeting elections, public protests, regional conflicts, and international relations.

The anonymity provided by many online platforms makes attribution difficult, allowing influence campaigns to operate with limited accountability.

e. Declining Trust in Institutions and Independent Media

Disinformation does not only spread false information—it also systematically erodes trust.

Across all three countries, information manipulation seeks to reduce public confidence in:

- electoral processes;
- governments;

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- judicial institutions;
 - international organizations;
 - independent journalism;
 - scientific expertise.

When citizens lose confidence in reliable sources, they become more susceptible to conspiracy theories and emotionally driven narratives.

In Moldova, repeated disinformation campaigns have attempted to undermine trust in electoral institutions and European integration.

In Armenia, political polarization following the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has intensified distrust toward both governmental institutions and opposition media.

In Azerbaijan, restrictions on independent journalism create additional challenges for building public confidence in diverse and credible information sources.

Conclusion

Despite important differences in political systems, media regulation, and regional security dynamics, Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan share a common information environment characterized by rapid digital communication, widespread social media use, coordinated influence campaigns, and increasing technological sophistication of disinformation. Common vulnerabilities—including low media literacy, declining trust in institutions, anonymous online manipulation, and the growing use of artificial intelligence—demonstrate that information manipulation has become a transnational challenge rather than a purely domestic issue.

Strengthening resilience therefore requires coordinated action involving governments, independent media, civil society organizations, educational institutions, technology platforms, and international partners. Expanding media literacy education, improving fact-checking capacity, increasing transparency of online platforms, developing AI detection tools, and promoting regional cooperation will be essential for protecting democratic discourse and strengthening societal resilience across the Eastern Partnership region.

6.2. Successful Approaches

Disinformation has become one of the most pressing challenges affecting democratic governance, public trust, and social cohesion in Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Several successful approaches have emerged to strengthen information resilience, improve media literacy, and counter false narratives. These initiatives demonstrate that a combination of

institutional action, civil society engagement, independent journalism, and digital education can significantly reduce the impact of disinformation.

One of the most effective approaches has been the development of media and information literacy (MIL) programs, particularly among young people. In Moldova, media literacy has become an increasingly important component of education and public awareness campaigns. Organizations such as the Independent Journalism Center (IJC), WatchDog.MD, and StopFals.md regularly organize workshops, produce educational materials, and publish fact-checking articles that help citizens identify manipulated information. According to a 2025 study by the Council of Europe and the Audiovisual Council of Moldova, 64% of Moldovans receive news daily from social media, 70% consider social media the main source of disinformation, while 96% believe it is important to distinguish fake news from factual information. These findings have encouraged greater investment in digital literacy initiatives targeting students, teachers, and local communities.

Another successful practice is the establishment of independent fact-checking platforms. In Moldova, StopFals.md has become one of the country's leading fact-checking initiatives, debunking false claims related to elections, public health, and foreign policy. During recent electoral campaigns, the platform verified hundreds of misleading statements and provided evidence-based corrections, contributing to a more informed public debate. Similar initiatives operate in Armenia, where organizations such as Media Initiatives Center, FIP.am (Fact Investigation Platform), and Hetq investigate misleading narratives, verify public statements, and expose coordinated disinformation campaigns. These platforms collaborate with journalists, researchers, and international partners to improve transparency and public access to verified information.

Strategic communication by public institutions has also become an important tool in countering disinformation. Moldova has strengthened cooperation between government institutions, the Audiovisual Council, and civil society organizations to improve communication during elections and periods of heightened geopolitical tension. Public institutions increasingly publish timely clarifications and verified information through official digital channels, reducing opportunities for false narratives to spread unchecked. Armenia has similarly invested in government communication mechanisms, particularly during periods of regional security crises, when rapid dissemination of accurate information is essential for maintaining public confidence.

A further successful approach involves regional and international cooperation. Organizations from Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan increasingly participate in joint projects supported by the European Union, the Council of Europe, UNESCO, and the Organization for

Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). These initiatives promote the exchange of good practices, training for journalists, development of common methodologies for fact-checking, and cross-border research on emerging disinformation trends. Regional dialogue has become especially valuable because many disinformation campaigns target multiple countries simultaneously using similar narratives and digital techniques.

Capacity building for journalists and civil society organizations represents another important area of progress. Across the three countries, hundreds of journalists have participated in training on digital verification, open-source intelligence (OSINT), cyber hygiene, ethical reporting, and artificial intelligence. These skills improve the quality of reporting and enhance the ability of media professionals to detect manipulated images, videos, and coordinated online campaigns. Civil society organizations have also expanded community outreach through public discussions, awareness campaigns, and local information hubs that encourage citizens to verify information before sharing it online.

Growing attention has also been given to countering AI-generated disinformation. As synthetic images, deepfakes, and AI-generated text become more widespread, media organizations and digital literacy programs increasingly include practical guidance on recognizing manipulated content. International partners have supported the development of new verification tools and training modules that enable journalists and educators to respond more effectively to emerging technological threats.

Although Azerbaijan operates in a more restricted media environment, successful practices have focused primarily on strengthening journalists' digital security, enhancing professional verification skills, and participating in regional knowledge-sharing initiatives supported by international organizations. Independent researchers and media professionals continue to contribute to monitoring online information ecosystems despite existing constraints.

Overall, the experiences of Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan demonstrate that there is no single solution to combating disinformation. Instead, the most successful approaches combine media literacy education, independent fact-checking, strategic public communication, support for quality journalism, digital innovation, and regional cooperation. These complementary measures strengthen societal resilience, increase public awareness, and improve citizens' ability to critically evaluate information in an increasingly complex digital environment. Continued investment in these areas will remain essential as disinformation tactics evolve and new technological challenges emerge.

6.3. Opportunities for Regional Cooperation

The study visits and exchanges between organizations from Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan demonstrated significant potential for long-term collaboration. Despite differences in political, media, and legal environments, participating organizations identified many shared challenges related to disinformation, civic participation, media literacy, and the protection of democratic values. The exchanges confirmed that regional cooperation can strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations (CSOs) to respond more effectively to common threats while promoting knowledge sharing and innovation.

One of the most important opportunities identified was the development of joint initiatives to counter disinformation. Across all three countries, participants emphasized that false information spreads rapidly through social media platforms, messaging applications, and coordinated online networks. These shared challenges create strong opportunities for collaborative awareness campaigns, common educational materials, and regional fact-checking initiatives.

The exchanges also revealed considerable potential for establishing a regional knowledge-sharing network. During the study visits, organizations presented successful practices in media literacy education, digital security, civic engagement, strategic communication, and community resilience. Creating an ongoing platform for exchanging methodologies, training materials, research findings, and policy recommendations would enable organizations to learn from one another while avoiding duplication of efforts. Such a network could organize annual conferences, webinars, expert discussions, and thematic working groups focused on emerging information threats, including AI-generated content and coordinated online manipulation.

Another promising area is joint research and comparative analysis. Collaborative research would allow organizations to compare trends across countries, identify common patterns, and develop evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and international partners. Producing regional reports and policy briefs together would increase the visibility and credibility of civil society expertise while supporting more coordinated responses.

The study visits further highlighted opportunities for capacity building and professional development. Participants expressed interest in continuing exchanges of trainers, experts, and practitioners through study visits, internships, mentoring programs, and online learning activities. Organizations from Moldova shared their experience in community-based media

literacy campaigns and civic monitoring, while partners from Armenia and Azerbaijan presented practical approaches to digital communication, youth engagement, and advocacy under different operating environments. These exchanges allow organizations to adapt successful approaches to their own national contexts while strengthening institutional capacities.

Youth engagement emerged as another priority for future cooperation. Young people are among the most active users of digital platforms and therefore among the groups most exposed to online manipulation. Regional youth initiatives—including media literacy camps, online debates, innovation competitions, and cross-border volunteer programs—could strengthen critical thinking skills while fostering intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding. Such activities would contribute not only to resilience against disinformation but also to the development of future civic leaders across the region.

The participating organizations also identified opportunities for joint advocacy at regional and international levels. By developing common policy recommendations and presenting coordinated positions to international institutions, donor organizations, and regional networks, civil society can amplify its voice on issues related to information integrity, digital rights, media freedom, and democratic governance. Coordinated advocacy is particularly valuable because many online threats transcend national borders and require cross-border solutions.

Finally, the study visits laid the foundation for the establishment of long-term strategic partnerships. The organizations agreed that continued cooperation should extend beyond individual projects toward sustainable institutional collaboration. Future partnerships may include joint grant applications, collaborative research projects, coordinated public awareness campaigns, shared monitoring mechanisms, and regular exchanges of expertise. These partnerships will improve organizational resilience, increase access to international funding opportunities, and create a stronger regional network capable of addressing emerging challenges collectively.

Overall, the exchanges demonstrated that Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan possess substantial opportunities for regional cooperation. By combining their expertise, experiences, and resources, civil society organizations can build more resilient communities, strengthen democratic participation, enhance media literacy, and develop coordinated responses to the increasingly complex challenges posed by disinformation in the South Caucasus and Eastern Partnership region.

Key Lessons Learned

The comparative analysis of Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan demonstrates that while disinformation narratives are often tailored to national contexts, the techniques used to spread them are remarkably similar. Social media manipulation, coordinated influence operations, AI-generated content, and emotionally driven narratives represent common threats across the region. Strengthening media literacy, supporting independent journalism, investing in digital investigation capacities, and fostering cross-border cooperation among civil society organizations are among the most effective strategies for building long-term societal resilience against disinformation. The exchange visits confirmed that regional partnerships provide valuable opportunities for sharing expertise, identifying common challenges, and developing coordinated responses to information manipulation.

Chapter VII: Strategic Recommendations for Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan to Counter Disinformation

The growing sophistication of disinformation campaigns across Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan requires coordinated, long-term, and evidence-based responses. While each country faces unique political, media, and security challenges, they also share common vulnerabilities, including high social media dependence, limited media literacy among certain population groups, foreign information influence, and rapidly evolving artificial intelligence (AI)-generated misinformation. The following recommendations are designed to strengthen national resilience while promoting regional cooperation.

Strengthen National Strategic Frameworks

Governments should adopt or update comprehensive national strategies dedicated to countering disinformation. These strategies should clearly define institutional responsibilities, coordination mechanisms, and response protocols while ensuring full respect for freedom of expression and democratic principles.

Recommendations:

- Develop national action plans addressing disinformation as part of broader cybersecurity and national security policies.
- Establish permanent interagency coordination mechanisms involving ministries, cybersecurity agencies, media regulators, and civil society.
- Regularly assess emerging disinformation threats through national risk assessments.
- Allocate sustainable public funding for long-term resilience initiatives rather than short-term campaigns.

Improve Media and Information Literacy

Building citizens' critical thinking skills remains the most sustainable defense against disinformation. Media literacy should become a lifelong educational priority rather than a one-time intervention.

Recommendations:

- Integrate media and digital literacy into school curricula at primary, secondary, and university levels.
- Organize continuous training for teachers on identifying online manipulation and AI-generated content.

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- Develop educational programs specifically targeting elderly populations, rural communities, and vulnerable social groups.
 - Support public awareness campaigns explaining how algorithms, bots, and manipulated content influence public opinion.
 - Encourage fact-checking habits before sharing online information.

Support Independent Journalism and Fact-Checking

Independent journalism remains one of the strongest safeguards against false information. Sustainable support mechanisms are necessary to maintain professional reporting standards.

Recommendations:

- Increase financial support opportunities for independent local and regional media.
- Expand cooperation between journalists and professional fact-checking organizations.
- Encourage investigative journalism addressing coordinated influence operations.
- Promote transparent media ownership and editorial independence.
- Develop rapid-response fact-checking mechanisms during elections and emergencies.

Enhance Digital Platform Accountability

Online platforms play a central role in amplifying misleading information. Greater transparency and cooperation between governments, civil society, and technology companies are needed.

Recommendations:

- Establish regular dialogue with major social media platforms regarding harmful disinformation trends.
- Improve transparency regarding political advertising and sponsored online content.
- Encourage faster removal of coordinated inauthentic behavior while protecting legitimate freedom of speech.
- Require clearer labeling of AI-generated images, videos, and synthetic media.
- Increase transparency regarding recommendation algorithms affecting information visibility.

Build Institutional Capacity

Public institutions require stronger technical and analytical capacities to monitor and respond to information manipulation.

Recommendations:

- Create specialized disinformation monitoring units within relevant public institutions.

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- Provide continuous training for civil servants, communication officers, diplomats, and security professionals.
 - Invest in AI-assisted monitoring systems capable of detecting coordinated manipulation campaigns.
 - Develop standardized crisis communication protocols to reduce information gaps during emergencies.
 - Strengthen cooperation between cybersecurity agencies and public communication departments.

Increase Civil Society Engagement

Civil society organizations play an essential role in community outreach, education, monitoring, and advocacy.

Recommendations:

- Support long-term funding for NGOs working on media literacy, digital rights, and civic education.
- Encourage community-based awareness initiatives tailored to local needs.
- Promote youth-led projects combating online misinformation.
- Involve civil society organizations in developing national policies related to information integrity.
- Expand cooperation between NGOs and local authorities.

Improve Election Information Integrity

Election periods remain particularly vulnerable to coordinated disinformation campaigns.

Recommendations:

- Establish early warning mechanisms before elections.
- Strengthen cooperation between election commissions, media regulators, and fact-checkers.
- Monitor coordinated foreign influence operations targeting electoral processes.
- Provide voters with reliable, easily accessible official information.
- Develop public reporting mechanisms for suspected disinformation.

Address Artificial Intelligence Risks

Artificial intelligence is increasingly used to create realistic fake images, videos, audio recordings, and automated propaganda.

Recommendations:

- Develop legal frameworks addressing malicious uses of generative AI.

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- Promote watermarking and labeling of AI-generated content.
 - Train journalists and public officials to identify deepfakes.
 - Support research on AI detection technologies.
 - Raise public awareness regarding synthetic media manipulation.

Strengthen Regional Cooperation

Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan face many common information threats despite differing political contexts. Regional cooperation can significantly improve preparedness.

Recommendations:

- Establish a permanent regional network of NGOs, researchers, journalists, and media experts.
- Organize annual regional conferences on countering disinformation.
- Conduct joint research on emerging regional information threats.
- Share methodologies, educational materials, and successful awareness campaigns.
- Develop regional rapid-alert systems for identifying cross-border disinformation campaigns.
- Implement joint training programs for journalists, educators, and civil society organizations.
- Encourage collaborative fact-checking initiatives covering regional narratives.
- Promote exchange visits between media professionals and civil society representatives.

Strengthen Research and Evidence-Based Policymaking

Effective responses require continuous monitoring of the evolving information environment.

Recommendations:

- Conduct regular nationwide surveys measuring public exposure to disinformation.
- Support academic research on online information manipulation.
- Develop standardized indicators for measuring societal resilience against disinformation.
- Create publicly accessible databases documenting major disinformation narratives and trends.
- Encourage cooperation between universities, research institutions, governments, and NGOs.

Country-Specific Priorities

Moldova

- Expand nationwide media literacy programs, particularly in rural areas.

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- Strengthen resilience against foreign information influence and election-related disinformation.
 - Increase institutional cooperation between public authorities, independent media, and civil society.
 - Improve strategic communication to counter false narratives regarding democratic reforms and European integration.

Armenia

- Address disinformation linked to regional security and conflict-related narratives.
- Strengthen independent journalism outside the capital.
- Improve public communication during crises to reduce information vacuums.
- Enhance digital literacy programs for youth and internally displaced communities.

Azerbaijan

- Increase access to reliable and diverse sources of information.
- Support professional journalism training and fact-based reporting.
- Encourage greater transparency in public communication.
- Expand media literacy initiatives focusing on identifying manipulated online content and AI-generated misinformation.

Conclusion

Countering disinformation requires more than reactive fact-checking; it demands a comprehensive approach that combines education, institutional resilience, independent journalism, technological innovation, and regional cooperation. For Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, sustained investment in media literacy, transparent governance, cross-sector partnerships, and evidence-based policymaking will strengthen democratic resilience and reduce the societal impact of false and manipulative information. By implementing these strategic recommendations collectively, the three countries can build a more resilient information environment capable of withstanding both domestic and external disinformation threats while fostering informed public participation and regional cooperation.

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