

Recommendations for  
strengthening Mauritania's  
resilience against  
disinformation  
White paper

## Foreword

This white paper was developed within the framework of the German Foreign Office project “Ready for the Future: An Explorer Lab on Disinformation“, implemented by DW Akademie as a partner for international media development. It is based on extensive discussions and findings gathered during workshops with international experts and Mauritanian participants that took place in Nouakchott during 13-19 December 2024, complemented by further background research.

Workshops were conducted to discuss challenges and opportunities that exist in the media landscape of Mauritania, especially regarding disinformation. The paper provides an overview of the media landscape in Mauritania, presenting key issues related to disinformation. It concludes with recommendations on actionable next steps through which Mauritania can strengthen its resilience against disinformation and support a more informed and engaged citizenry.



Group photo after conclusion of the workshop “Ready for the Future”: An Explorer Lab, 19<sup>th</sup> December 2024, Mauritania. 2024 – All rights reserved. Licensed to DW Akademie under conditions.

We extend our acknowledgement to our lead expert Dr. Walid Al-Saqaf as well as to Dr. Moath Althaher and Mohamed Al Ahmadi for their invaluable support and contributions during the workshop. Our gratitude also goes to the Mauritanian participants, whose motivation and active engagement were essential to the workshop's success. We would also like to express our sincere appreciation to the German Foreign Office for funding this initiative, as well as to our international partners for their vital support in Mauritania.

This paper was developed by DW Akademie, drawing on the insights and input provided by our esteemed experts with a particular thanks to the lead expert Dr. Walid Al-Saqaf.

# 01

# Context

- 1.1. Introduction**
- 1.2. Key objectives**
- 1.3. Proposed interventions**
- 1.4. Expected outcomes and impact metrics**

## **1.1 Introduction**

This section outlines the key objectives, proposed interventions, and expected outcomes of efforts aimed at combating disinformation in Mauritania. The initiatives presented here emphasize empowering citizens with critical thinking skills, fostering ethical practices among media professionals, and encouraging multi-stakeholder collaboration.

By integrating gender diversity and youth engagement into these strategies, Mauritania seeks to ensure that all segments of society are represented and involved in combating disinformation. The ultimate goal is to create a more informed and united citizenry, capable of mitigating the risks posed by disinformation and promoting a stable and cohesive social environment amidst the challenges of regional volatility.

## **1.2 Key Objectives**

- a) **Improve Media Literacy:**  
Educate the public on how to identify credible sources and recognize tactics of disinformation in order to think more critically and make better decisions on information received via different media.
- b) **Strengthen Fact-Checking Mechanisms:**  
Establish and support independent fact-checking organizations in order to verify claims and disseminate accurate information, especially during elections and public health crises.
- c) **Responsible Journalism:**  
Encourage ethical reporting standards among journalists and media outlets to ensure that factual information is relayed to the public.
- d) **Encourage Collaboration:**  
Engage in the development of partnerships among government, civil society, and media for sharing resources, strategies, and information in combating disinformation.
- e) **Gender Diversity and Engaging the Youth:**  
Emphasize an integrative approach to gender balance and full engagement of youth in these efforts. This means that every activity addresses the perspectives and needs of women and young people, both as beneficiaries and participants, to make the response to misinformation more inclusive and fair.

## **1.3 Proposed Interventions**

- Create and implement comprehensive media literacy programs for diverse audiences, such as youth, educators, civil society actors, and community leaders.
- Run a nationwide campaign to increase knowledge regarding fact-checking activities specifically for journalists and actors involved in content creation to limit the amount of disinformation reaching the public via journalistic and social media channels.

- Organize workshops and training sessions for journalists on best practices in reporting and the ethical implications of creating or spreading disinformation whether intentionally or unintentionally.
- Establish a multi-stakeholder task force to address disinformation collaboratively, involving government agencies, NGOs, and tech companies.

#### **1.4 Expected Outcomes and Impact Metrics**

- Increased awareness and understanding of disinformation among the Mauritanian population, measured through pre- and post-intervention surveys on media literacy.
- A measurable reduction in the sharing of disinformation on social media platforms, tracked through analytics and engagement metrics.
- Enhanced trust in media outlets and fact-checking organizations, assessed through public perception surveys.
- Improved reporting standards and ethical practices among journalists, evaluated through audits and feedback from media consumers.

Through these targeted objectives and interventions, Mauritania aims to build a resilient society that can effectively combat disinformation, ultimately fostering a more informed and engaged citizenry. By addressing disinformation, the country also enhances its capacity to monitor and mitigate risks associated with radicalization and violent conflicts, which are pressing concerns given the volatile regional dynamics in neighboring countries.

# 02

## Background and context

- 2.1. Current state of disinformation in Mauritania**
- 2.2. An overview of Mauritania's media landscape**
- 2.3. Challenges and vulnerabilities**
- 2.4. Future scenarios of disinformation**

## **2.1 Current State of Disinformation in Mauritania**

The media and information landscape of Mauritania has a number of structural features that make it particularly vulnerable to disinformation. There has been a recent and rapid increase in the use of social media, especially WhatsApp, TikTok and Facebook, which creates new avenues for the spread of false information at incredible speeds. The Internet penetration in Mauritania remains low compared to global standards, contributing to an information gap between urban and rural populations. Most outstandingly, ethnic and linguistic diversity shapes the pattern of disinformation. Indeed, the fact that messages spread in several languages-Arabic, French, Pulaar, Soninke, and Wolof-might make fact-checking complicated and lead to misconceptions across the various communities. The country's traditional media landscape still needs to catch up with fact-checking and verification in an environment with growing polarization of the media and few resources.

Political tensions have earlier served as a conduit for disinformation, especially when it comes to election periods. The 2019 presidential election had really shown how social media platforms may serve as conduits for the dissemination of false narratives on candidatures and electoral processes. Inadequate fact-checking systems with low media literacy among the populace meant these were hard to refute. Regulatory frameworks for addressing disinformation remain nascent. Laws exist to regulate the operation of media; however, they have not moved quickly enough to keep pace with a changing digital landscape. This is coupled with limited institutional capacity to monitor and address false information, which hinders efforts to maintain integrity in information.

Although participants in the workshops held in Nouakchott as part of the training programme did not indicate that disinformation has reached significant levels at this stage, they did recognize that it is a growing threat, particularly in relation to the spread of false information in the culture and health domains. Furthermore, there are clear signs that the problem is growing, particularly with the increasing penetration of social media and online platforms in Mauritania. Limited media literacy among the population and the rapid spread of digital communication create vulnerabilities that could enable the proliferation of false narratives, conspiracy theories, and misleading information. Drawing on experiences from neighboring contexts, there is every reason to believe that similar risks could emerge in Mauritania if left unaddressed. Recognizing this potential, the government, civil society, and media organizations have an opportunity to act preemptively to prepare society and build resilience against disinformation before it becomes an insurmountable challenge. This includes safeguarding democratic processes, promoting social cohesion, and ensuring informed public discourse.

## **2.2 An Overview of Mauritania's Media Landscape**

### **2.2.1 Mainstream Media**

Mauritania's media ecosystem comprises a diverse array of both state-owned and privately-operated platforms across print, broadcast, and digital modalities. The High Authority for Press and Audiovisual Material (HAPA) oversees this ecosystem with two core objectives: regulation and quality control, and the provision of training for media professionals. While ensuring compliance with established press laws and guidelines, HAPA also emphasizes the

promotion of freedom of expression as a cornerstone of its mission, balancing regulatory oversight with efforts to empower media organizations and uphold journalistic standards..

### **State-Owned Media**

- **Television of Mauritania (TVM):** The national public television network, which provides programming in Arabic and French. TVM manages several channels, including El Mouritaniya (general content), El Mouritaniya 2 (dedicated to national languages), Arriadia (sports-focused), Athagavia (cultural programming), and Al Barlemania (coverage of parliamentary activities).
- **Radio Mauritanie:** The national radio service, transmitting programs in Arabic and French.
- **Mauritanian News Agency (AMI):** The official governmental news agency, disseminating information in Arabic, French, and English.

### **Prominent Private Media Outlets**

- **Alakhbar:** A prominent independent news agency producing content in Arabic and French.
- **Le Calame:** A bilingual weekly newspaper published in Arabic and French, recognized for its independent journalism.
- **Chaab:** A daily newspaper published in Arabic.
- **Horizons:** A daily newspaper published in French.
- **Nouakchott Info:** A daily French-language publication.

Mauritania's media landscape has undergone substantial transformation in recent years, characterized by an increase in the number of private media entities, thereby contributing to a more varied and dynamic media environment.

### **2.2.2 Digital Media Penetration**

Mauritania's media landscape has been evolving with increasing digital penetration. The country has seen a gradual rise in internet access, with mobile connectivity being the primary means through which most citizens access digital content. As of 2023, internet penetration stands at approximately 40%, with a significant portion of the population utilizing smartphones. This shift has led to a growing reliance on social media platforms for news consumption, particularly among younger demographics.

The primary platforms for information dissemination in Mauritania include:

- **Social Media:** Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter are among the most popular platforms for sharing news and information. They serve as vital channels for both traditional media outlets and independent content creators.
- **Online News Portals:** Several local news websites have emerged, providing coverage on various topics, including politics, economy, and social issues. Examples include:

- **Sahara Medias:** A leading news platform providing coverage on events in Mauritania and the wider Sahara region.
- **Kassataya:** An online news outlet concentrating on Mauritanian, African, and international affairs, featuring sections dedicated to politics and society.
- **CRIDEM:** A French-language news portal addressing various elements of Mauritanian society.
- **Mauriweb:** A digital news site that offers extensive reporting on national occurrences.
- **Taqadoum:** A news website that publishes articles regarding current events in Mauritania.

It is noteworthy that while there is an increasing presence of online news websites in Mauritania, print and broadcast media (television and radio) still play an important role. State-run television and radio remain significant, but private media is increasingly gaining traction in the digital space.

### **2.2.3 Key Stakeholders in the Information Ecosystem:**

The information ecosystem in Mauritania comprises various stakeholders, including:

- **Government:** The Mauritanian government, through entities such as HAPA, plays a crucial role in overseeing media and information flows in the public domain. While state-controlled entities continue to dominate traditional media, there is a growing push for media freedom and independent journalism, supported in part by HAPA's objectives of promoting quality control, training, and freedom of expression.
- **Media Organizations:** Both public and private media outlets contribute to the information landscape, with a mix of traditional and digital formats. Journalists and media professionals are actively engaging in advocacy for press freedom.
- **Civil Society:** Non-governmental organizations and advocacy groups work towards promoting transparency, freedom of expression, and access to information, often utilizing digital platforms for outreach and activism.
- **International Organizations:** Various international bodies support media development in Mauritania, providing training, resources, and funding to enhance journalistic standards and promote independent media. However, these organizations have less influence on the information ecosystem in Mauritania compared to neighboring countries such as Libya or Morocco, where their impact has been more pronounced.

This evolving media landscape in Mauritania reflects broader global trends, with digital media increasingly shaping how information is consumed and shared.

## **2.3 Challenges and Vulnerabilities**

The spread of disinformation in Mauritania presents complex challenges that affect various aspects of society and media operations. In this paper, we explore four key dimensions of the disinformation landscape: patterns of manipulation that undermine public trust, platform-

specific challenges particularly related to social media, significant gaps in institutional capacity that hinder effective response, and socio-cultural factors that influence information consumption.

Understanding these interconnected elements is crucial for developing comprehensive recommendations to strengthen Mauritania's information ecosystem that is resilient enough to withstand and confront disinformation in the future.

### **2.3.1 Patterns of Manipulations**

- **False Narratives:** Mauritania faces increasing challenges with the spread of misinformation and disinformation, particularly on social media platforms and in health, culture, or social issues. False narratives can quickly gain traction, undermining public trust in legitimate news sources.
- **Political Manipulation:** Disinformation is also used to a limited degree as a tool for political gain, with various factions spreading misleading information to discredit opponents or influence public opinion.

### **2.3.2 Platform-Specific Challenges**

- **Social Media Influence:** Platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp are widely used in Mauritania, making them hotspots for the dissemination of false information. The rapid sharing capabilities of these platforms can exacerbate the spread of disinformation. By contrast, platforms like TikTok and Instagram are less prevalent in Mauritania than in neighboring countries, limiting their impact on the local information ecosystem. .
- **Lack of Regulation:** A general regulatory framework to manage content on social media is not in place. While this creates challenges in addressing harmful disinformation effectively, it should be noted that in neighboring countries with such frameworks, these are often misused to silence critical voices. Thus, the absence of a regulatory framework in Mauritania might avoid such misuse but leaves significant gaps in addressing disinformation.

### **2.3.3 Institutional Capacity Gaps**

In a survey conducted during the workshops, participants were asked about the readiness of Mauritanian newsrooms to tackle disinformation. Respondents overwhelmingly described newsrooms as largely unprepared due to gaps in training, tools, and institutional support. Key challenges identified include:

- Lack of necessary training and tools for addressing disinformation.
- Significant variation in readiness levels across media organizations, with most lacking structured approaches to verification.
- An overarching deficiency in technical and professional capabilities, particularly in employing digital verification techniques and addressing logistical challenges.

These findings underscore the urgency of implementing tailored capacity-building initiatives to enhance institutional preparedness and professional competencies. Hence, it is possible to summarize the two institutional gaps as follows:

- **Limited Journalistic Training:** Many journalists in Mauritania lack access to training programs that equip them with the skills needed to identify and combat disinformation. This gap can lead to unintentional dissemination of false information.
- **Weak Media Institutions:** Institutional weaknesses, including inadequate funding and resources (e.g., Internet services, computers, software, etc.), hinder the ability of media organizations to fact-check information and uphold journalistic standards.

#### **2.3.4 Socio-Cultural Factors**

- **Low Media Literacy:** A significant portion of the population has low media literacy, making it difficult for individuals to critically assess the information they encounter. This vulnerability can lead to the acceptance of false narratives as truth.
- **Cultural Norms and Trust:** In some communities, traditional sources of information may be preferred over established media outlets. This can create challenges for journalists trying to combat misinformation and build trust in their reporting.

Mauritania's media landscape is challenged by disinformation patterns, platform-specific issues, institutional capacity gaps, and socio-cultural factors, all of which contribute to the vulnerability of the information ecosystem. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach involving education, regulation, and capacity building.

### **2.4 Future Scenarios of Disinformation**

If left unaddressed, disinformation in Mauritania could lead to several concerning scenarios that threaten social stability and development. Based on current trends and regional experiences, the following scenarios warrant particular attention:

#### **2.4.1 Erosion of Public Health Trust and Safety**

The spread of dangerous health misinformation could emerge as a critical threat, undermining public health initiatives and medical authority. Mauritania's strong influence of traditional beliefs and practices makes the country particularly vulnerable to health-related disinformation. This could manifest in resistance against essential medical interventions, rejection of public health measures, and the proliferation of potentially harmful traditional remedies, especially during health crises. The workshop participants specifically highlighted concerns about the spread of false health information and its impact on community well-being.

#### **2.4.2 Deterioration of Multi-ethnic Social Fabric**

Mauritania's diverse ethnic and cultural landscape faces significant risks from unchecked disinformation. False narratives could exploit existing differences and tensions between various communities, potentially leading to increased social friction. The presence of various linguistic groups and migrant communities from neighboring countries adds another layer of

complexity, as disinformation could target specific communities or exploit language barriers to create division.

Workshop participants noted that social and cultural rumors already represent the most prevalent form of disinformation, making this scenario particularly concerning.

### **2.4.3 Destabilization of Economic Growth**

The country's economic stability could suffer as false information impacts market confidence and investment decisions. Coordinated disinformation campaigns could deter international investment and damage business relationships, particularly affecting Mauritania's emerging sectors. The manufacturing of artificial crises through social media could create market volatility and undermine economic development initiatives. This scenario is particularly relevant given Mauritania's efforts to diversify its economy and attract foreign investment.

### **2.4.4 Undermining of Democratic Institutions**

While political disinformation currently ranks lower among concerns in Mauritania, the potential for its growth remains significant. The integrity of democratic processes could be compromised through voter manipulation and the erosion of trust in governmental institutions. This could manifest through the spread of false narratives about electoral processes, targeted disinformation campaigns during political events, and the gradual deterioration of public confidence in democratic systems.

The workshop participants noted that while this threat currently seems less pressing than social and health-related disinformation, it requires proactive attention to prevent future challenges. They highlighted the importance of being proactive and laying the groundwork to build robust and sustainable fact-checking initiatives in the months and years to come.

# 03

## Recommendations & proposed interventions

- 3.1 Operational level**
- 3.2 Policy level**
- 3.3 Legislative framework**
- 3.4 Institutional support**
- 3.5 Regional cooperation**

### **3.1 Operational Level**

To ensure the project's effectiveness, certain implementation priorities should be addressed on an operational level:

#### **3.1.1 Launch Media Literacy Programs**

- Provide support to initiatives targeting schools and communities, including in rural areas.
- Focus on building critical thinking skills to help citizens identify and resist disinformation.

#### **3.1.2 Establish Fact-Checking Infrastructure**

- Support existing initiatives that utilize advanced fact-checking methods, fostering synergy and collaboration with other similar initiatives in the country. An example is the 2023 HAPA initiative, in collaboration with ARCOM, which emphasized enhancing media regulation during elections, with a focus on fact-checking mechanisms and combating misinformation to ensure pluralism and reduce hate speech in Mauritanian media.
- Provide resources, tools, and training to enhance their capabilities and expand their reach.
- Draw on successful models from other African countries to provide trainees with practical platforms to apply their skills.

#### **3.1.3 Implement Training Programs on Ethical Reporting and Verification Techniques**

- Focus on enhancing journalistic standards for media professionals.
- Equip trainees with skills to verify information and address the ethical challenges posed by disinformation.

### **3.2 Policy level**

Policy-wise, it is essential that resources are allocated for carrying out studies that understand the threats and challenges in the disinformation space. This entails efficient allocation of resources to bring in experts and carry out nation-wide surveys to understand the dimension and impact of the problem. Recruiting and experts in media, technology and public policy would be necessary to produce the required studies that would then inform decision-makers on what sort of implementation plans need to be implemented.

### **3.3 Legislative framework**

To enhance the project's outcomes and facilitate the work of trainees, it is essential to support the development of a legislative framework that balances information integrity with freedom of expression. The project can play a pivotal role by identifying key areas where legislation can effectively combat disinformation. This can be achieved by organizing workshops, seminars, and producing policy papers that provide guidance to Mauritanian decision-makers. Through these activities, the project can offer insights into best practices and legal frameworks from

other countries, helping policymakers craft laws that support the project's objectives while respecting civil liberties. By engaging legal experts and stakeholders in collaborative discussions, the project can contribute to a nuanced legislative environment that empowers institutions to address disinformation effectively.

### **3.4 Institutional support**

Strengthening institutional capacities is crucial for the sustainability of anti-disinformation efforts. The project can support this by providing training and resources to key institutions involved in media regulation and information dissemination. By facilitating capacity-building programs for government agencies, media organizations, and independent bodies, the project can enhance their ability to monitor media content and enforce ethical standards. Additionally, the project can assist in developing guidelines and protocols that support ethical journalism and fact-checking practices. By fostering partnerships between institutions and promoting collaborative networks, the project can create a supportive ecosystem that amplifies the impact of trainees and ensures the longevity of anti-disinformation initiatives.

### **3.5 Regional cooperation**

Recognizing that disinformation often transcends national borders, the project can encourage and facilitate regional cooperation. By organizing regional conferences and workshops, the project can bring together stakeholders from neighboring countries to share experiences, strategies, and best practices. Producing comparative studies and policy papers on regional disinformation trends can provide valuable insights for Mauritanian decision-makers. The project can also support the establishment of regional networks and alliances focused on combating disinformation, thereby enhancing collaborative efforts. Through these initiatives, the project not only strengthens Mauritania's resilience but also contributes to a coordinated regional response to disinformation.

# 04

## Conclusion

**4.1 Key success factors**

**4.2 Critical path elements**

**4.3 Recommendations & future actions**

**4.4 Applying a context-specific approach**

#### **4.1 Key success factors**

The success of the project in enhancing Mauritania's resilience against disinformation hinges on several key factors. Strong commitment and support from government and policymakers are crucial; the project's initiatives will be more impactful with active engagement from decision-makers. Collaborative efforts involving media, civil society, and international partners will amplify the project's reach and effectiveness.

Public engagement is also vital; by involving citizens in recognizing and combating disinformation, the project fosters a culture of critical thinking that supports its objectives. Notably, in response to growing challenges, HAPA requested support from the German Embassy in 2023 to strengthen the capacities of journalists on quality journalism and fact-checking through DW Akademie. Securing sustainable funding ensures that the project can maintain and expand its programs, providing ongoing support to trainees and institutions involved in anti-disinformation efforts.

#### **4.2 Critical path elements**

Several essential components require immediate attention to ensure the project's success. Supporting the development of legal and regulatory frameworks will provide a solid foundation for combating disinformation. Enhancing institutional capacity by building the abilities of organizations and individuals involved in the project will strengthen the overall response to disinformation. Developing the necessary technological and organizational infrastructure is fundamental for effective operations and for facilitating the work of trainees. Implementing monitoring and evaluation systems will allow the project to track progress, make data-driven adjustments, and ensure that strategies remain effective over time.

#### **4.3 Recommendations & Future Actions**

To streamline the project's objectives and ensure effective implementation, the following consolidated recommendations and actions are proposed:

##### **a. Strengthen Media Literacy Initiatives**

- Launch targeted media literacy programs for schools, communities, and youth to build critical thinking skills.
- Develop culturally appropriate materials in Arabic and local languages to ensure accessibility and inclusivity.

##### **b. Enhance Existing Fact-Checking Initiatives**

- Support and strengthen current organizations and initiatives that employ advanced fact-checking methods.
- Provide training, tools, and technical resources to improve their capacity and sustainability.

##### **c. Implement Capacity-Building Programs for Media Professionals**

- Deliver structured training programs on ethical reporting, digital verification tools, and synthetic media detection.

- Focus on hands-on practice tailored to Mauritania’s media landscape and emerging disinformation challenges.

#### **d. Foster Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration**

- Build partnerships between government entities, media organizations, civil society, and international actors to address disinformation collectively.
- Prioritize gender balance and youth inclusion in all initiatives to promote diversity and equity.

#### **e. Develop and Support Regulatory Frameworks**

- Engage policymakers to establish a balanced legal and regulatory framework that addresses disinformation while safeguarding freedom of expression.
- Share best practices from regional and international experiences to guide policy development.

#### **f. Monitor Emerging Risks and Mitigate Them Proactively**

- Leverage tools and collaborative networks to monitor disinformation trends, particularly during sensitive periods such as elections.
- Anticipate and address risks related to radicalization and regional conflicts before they escalate.

#### **g. Ensure Long-Term Sustainability**

- Secure diverse funding sources, including international donors, governmental support, and private sector partnerships, to sustain initiatives.
- Integrate media literacy and fact-checking training into educational curricula and institutional frameworks for systemic, long-term impact.

### **4.4 Applying a Context-Specific Approach**

With its rich tapestry of tribes and ethnic groups, multilingualism at the level of Arabic, French, and local languages, and peculiar pattern of population distribution, Mauritania has its share of unique challenges compared to other Arab countries. This calls for solutions that are context-specific to take into account the generally low state of telecommunications infrastructure and institutional capacity, which are compounded by low research attention and data availability. Fundamental gaps in the awareness of disinformation and the need for French-language training emerged as important findings from the workshops. These are further exacerbated by a general lack of prioritization by international organizations and donors, leading to gaps in knowledge on the information landscape of the country. With the implementation of recommendations considering these distinctive factors, Mauritania will be better able to create a resilient information ecosystem. Success will depend upon access to resources and collaboration that remains firmly based in the social, cultural, and infrastructural particularities of the country. The way forward, thus, presents an opportunity to reinforce democratic discourse in response to the prevailing international deficit in support and attention.

# Imprint


DW Akademie is Deutsche Welle's center for international media development, journalism training and knowledge transfer. Our projects strengthen the human rights to freedom of expression and unhindered access to information. DW Akademie empowers people worldwide to make independent decisions based on reliable facts and constructive dialogue.


DW Akademie is a strategic partner of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. We also receive funding from the Federal Foreign Office and the European Union and are active in around 70 developing countries and emerging economies.

Publisher: Deutsche Welle, 53110 Bonn, Germany  
Responsible: Carsten von Nahmen  
Published: December 2024

© 2024 DW Akademie All rights reserved.

 [dwakademie](#)

 [dw\\_akademie](#)

 [dw akademie](#)

 [dw-akademie.com](#)



Federal Foreign Office