

20th Annual Meeting of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) Oslo, Norway, 23-27 June

Open Forum #16 AI and Disinformation: Countering the Threats to Democratic Dialogue

Report

The Open Forum 16 “*AI and Disinformation: Countering the Threats to Democratic Dialogue*” was organised by the Council of Europe. It enabled participants to explore the pressing issue of countering disinformation in the age of artificial intelligence (AI). It was highlighted that countering disinformation remains a top priority for the Council of Europe, which has recently adopted the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence, Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law — the first legally binding international treaty on AI. Additionally, the non-binding Guidance Note on Countering Online Mis- and Disinformation sets out recommendations built around three pillars: fact-checking, platform design rooted in human rights, and user empowerment, providing a solid foundation for future work in this area.



The discussion focused on how AI can both challenge and facilitate the safeguarding of a healthy digital information ecosystem. Speakers reflected on the evolution of disinformation from pre-AI “artisanal” efforts to the current era of large-scale “automated” dissemination. It was noted that AI holds the potential to accelerate the fragmentation of shared narratives across various sectors, including journalism and government intelligence. Key risks include persistent disinformation, at-scale radicalisation, and biases embedded in AI models. The need for systemic, inclusive, and empowering approaches to strengthen the information ecosystem was emphasised.

Speakers also addressed the surge in deepfakes and AI-generated content, highlighting their potentially severe consequences, especially in conflict contexts. Disinformation campaigns were found to be now cheaper and more effective, creating a vicious cycle in which AI-generated falsehoods are further amplified by other AI systems. Reference was made to the phenomenon of “LLM grooming” — a tactic where malicious actors deliberately feed large language models with mis- and disinformation. It was noted that this problem is even more acute in non-English contexts, where chatbots accuracy is lower, and where press diversity is more limited.

The Open Forum provided for the opportunity to also focus on the recently adopted Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence (adopted on 17 May 2024) and the principles it establishes to safeguard human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, while supporting innovation. Information was provided also on the ongoing work of the Council of Europe Committee on Artificial Intelligence (CAI), which is developing a risk and impact assessment methodology to guide ethical and responsible AI deployment by developers and other stakeholders. Panellists shared relevant national practices to tackle AI-generated disinformation and showcased initiatives designed to enhance AI literacy, empowering citizens to critically assess AI-generated content.

Positive examples included also bottom-up approaches to work with ethical AI, promoting self-regulation and annual transparency reporting. Speakers emphasised the importance of enhancing resilience against AI-generated disinformation starting with education, particularly for children, who are both vulnerable to, and potential unwitting spreaders, of false information. It was noted that early education empowers children to understand algorithms and use AI creatively and critically. Education should be seen as not only a protective measure but as a long-term investment in democratic resilience.

Participants in the Open Forum engaged in the Q&A session, further addressing key issues raised during the discussion, including: the benefits of effective education and strategies to strengthen digital literacy; the role of fact-checkers; the use of AI chatbots to promote media literacy; incentives for providers to prioritise trustworthy information; and co-regulation models that foster truth-seeking as a market incentive.

Overall, the panel underscored the dual nature of AI as both a challenge and a potential ally in the fight against disinformation. Strengthening regulatory frameworks, promoting literacy, and fostering ethical self- and co-regulation were identified as key steps to building a more resilient information environment.