Focus on preventive measures to tackle harmful practices

[00:00:18] **Speaker 1** Hello and welcome to module four of the massive open online course "Information and Elections in The Digital Era." As you know, this course is organized by the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas with the support of UNESCO and UNDP. Hello and welcome back, everyone. I'm very happy and proud that you're here with us today to start working on the fourth module of our MOOC. As you know, my name is Albertina Piterbarg, and I'm an electorate expert at UNESCO and a leading instructor of this course. Let's start!

[00:00:51] Module 1, we will talk about preventive measures to tackle disinformation, misinformation, malinformation, and hate speech in electoral processes. In this module, we will examine possible preventive measures to implement in order to tackle and mitigate the negative effects of disinformation and misinformation, malinformation, and hate speech during elections. These measures are technological awareness and adaptability; promotion of dialog and social cohesion; civic education, voter education, and media and information literacy; public information campaigns; and communication for developing and working with the media and the journalists. Let's start with the measures to tackle disinformation, misinformation, and malinformation during the electoral cycle. Just as a brief reminder in this module, we will start examining in detail some of the preventive measures available to tackle disinformation, misinformation, malinformation, and hate speech, as we have already said. But in a previous module, we saw that these responses can be grouped into four different categories. Preventive measures are one of them, but we also have identification, fact-checking, and monitoring measures, regulatory and non-regulatory measures, and corrective measures or containing corrective measures. As I said, we will focus on preventive measures.

[00:02:26] Preventive measures are, simply put, all the actions taken beforehand to avoid a particular detrimental event or a series of detrimental events. In this case, we're going to mention some of the preventive measures that have proved to be effective in an electoral context. These preventive measures are the increase of technological awareness and adaptability; strategic human resource policies and capacity building; promotion dialogue and social cohesion; civic education, voter education, and media and information literacy; public information campaigns and communication for development; and working with the media and the journalists. Technological awareness is a very important point of preventive measures. The preparation of an election includes many procedures that can be automated by technology, like computer programs and specific applications for voter registration, the configuration of the lists of candidates, voting districts, the date of the election, and other electoral-specific tasks related to the electoral cycle. Electoral stakeholders might also use new technology to disseminate and convey their messages, including political campaign messages, institutional communication messages, and voter education messages, among many others. For this reason, it is very important to increase the technological awareness, adaptability, and capacity of all electoral stakeholders through training and through capacity building and also by working in collaboration with information and communication technology experts as well as media professionals.

[00:04:14] Let's take a look at one of the most important preventing measures: the promotion of dialogue and social cohesion. A social, cohesive society is one where all the groups have a sense of belonging, participation, inclusion, recognition, and legitimacy. Such societies are not necessarily demographically homogeneous, but rather it is by respecting everyone's voices and rights, and choices that this happens. So preventing electoral-related disinformation, misinformation, malinformation, hate speech, and online

electoral-related violence is about promoting social cohesion. Fostering social cohesion is one of the most effective safeguards against outbreaks of violence during times of high tension. Dialogue needs to be promoted well in advance to the electoral states, particularly in a context polluted by exacerbated hate speech and misinformation. Some good practices for social cohesion are civic education campaigns and public awareness efforts; training and support for civil society organizations, particularly those organizations that would monitor human rights or monitor and observe elections; engaging with the media, including through workshops and capacity building; engagement with Internet platforms and social media companies; promote dialogue for peace at a community level; work with women groups as well with vulnerable groups or displaced populations.

[00:05:52] No less important as preventive measures are civic education, voter education, and media and information literacy. But what is the difference between civic and voter education, and what exactly does information literacy mean? Let us start with what all of them should have in common: neutrality. If civic and voter education or media information literacy have political content, they become political propaganda and seriously compromise the credibility of an electoral process. So one of the main principles of all electoral-related education in any of its versions is impartiality. Well, let's start one by one. Civic education aims to educate citizens about civic life in a democracy. It explains what the duties, rights, the responsibilities are. It also looks to educate people on the role of the government and democratic institutions. Citizens need to be familiar with the Constitution and electoral legal framework of their country. So civic education explains the division of power and the general goals for the electoral processes. Civic education is primarily conducted in formal education settings like schools, and it's not bound to any electoral process in particular. Voter education helps to ensure that voters are ready to participate in electoral processes. Voter education explains: what we are going to vote, when we are going to vote, where we are going to vote, and how we are going to vote. And also, how to register, which documents we need to carry with us or to be sent to the authorities, even when and how the results in going to be announced. Voter education is critical for peaceful elections, and this sense is one of the most important preventive measures we can implement.

[00:07:56] After the coffee break, we will examine together the concept of media and information literacy. See you in five.

[00:08:03] Let's continue by examining together media and information literacy. When information literacy develops, the capacity of the citizens to make more informed choices about the news they consume and the content they share helps citizens to assess whether certain news or contests are true or false. It just strengthens critical skills and builds the electorate's awareness about manipulation strategies that appeal to their emotions. Media and information literacy also addresses citizens' digital rights and their links with fundamental constitutional rights and human rights. Let's take a look at different initiatives aimed at improving citizens' media and information literacy. One category of media literacy initiatives teaches media literacy and critical thinking through participation in different games and online games, particularly games where the participants need to identify if what they are reading is fake or not fake, if it's true or false, etc. So this is a way of engaging people, not only children and youths, to gain knowledge and experience about what is going on in the media. One example is FAKEY by the University of Indiana in the United States. This initiative aims at players to share or like critical articles and reports or ask for fact-checking for suspicious ones. Another initiative is one called iReporter. BBC develop reporter as an interactive game that gives young players the role of a journalist who needs to report on the news without falling prey to disinformation. There are also more traditional

school-based approaches to media literacy, which are targeting preteens and teens—just when they start taking an interest in social media, news, and politics—. Some examples include the school media clubs run by the NGO African Center for Media and Information Literacy Africa meeting in Nigeria that looks to help young people understand and access the media, as well as encourage the interaction of media and information literacy into the school curriculum. The Media and Digital Literacy Academy of Beirut is another example. All the Lie Detectors, a nonprofit initiative in Belgium and Germany, puts journalists in the classrooms to interact directly with students and teach about youth literacy and news verification practices.

[00:10:42] As we mentioned in previous modules, public trust in elections is being targeted around the world by a series of disinformation campaigns from a range of national and international actors. This has given rise to an increasing lack of trust in democratic institutions. For that, one of the preventive measures that are very effective in tackling these issues is public information campaigns. And we are going to analyze why public information campaigns are so powerful. As we have already seen in our previous modules, disinformation campaigns often begin well before elections to create confusion, polarize the social context, and create conditions to challenge the results. One of the most powerful preventive measures consists in implementing positive, targeted public information campaigns to counteract disinformation campaigns and provide tools for citizens to access reliable information. They also help to promote political participation and social cohesion. Combining the methods and instruments of interpersonal communication, community media, and modern information technologies. Campaigns and social media have extraordinary reach. They can potentially integrate voting and election information into people's social lives, thereby normalizing electoral participation and promoting a culture of political engagement. Social media platforms are reaching groups not usually engaged by politicians and elections and political processes, like youth. Social media may be a particularly relevant source of information for first-time voters. And also it plays a really important role for young people living in rural and non-urban areas. People who get electoral information are more likely to vote. And the best way to promote voting is to reach out to people and give them information and make them feel involved in decision-making. These can be done through public information campaigns on social media.

[00:12:51] Recently UNESCO, together with the Independent Electoral Boundaries Commission, launched a communication campaign to promote peaceful 2022 elections in Kenya. This campaign contributed to strengthening freedom of expression, access to information, and the prevention of electoral conflicts by targeting young people in order to combat disinformation, misinformation and to consolidate peace and democracy. To reach the main target audience [young people,] the campaign was adapted to different media and linguistic groups. A network of national electoral stakeholders was involved in the design and testing at all stages of the campaign, as well as collaborated in its dissemination and monitoring through the means of a steering committee. As you can see, the main messages were adapted to the electoral calendar— which we referred to in the last module—and they were phased, which meant that we had some messages that were conveyed during the pre-electoral period, some others that were conveyed during the electoral period, and some other messages that were conveyed during the post-electoral period.

[00:14:00] To finalize examining and analyzing preventive measures, we are going to address the fundamental importance of working with the media. As we have already mentioned several times before, democratic elections depend on the information available to citizens on technical and institutional logistic issues linked to the electoral process and

on the public's knowledge of those seeking their votes and the programs that they are proposing. Only free and independent journalists can fully assume the duty of providing the needed information. As fundamental actors of democracy, journalists need to prepare for elections, understand how it works, which are the most relevant events in each one of the electoral cycle phases and be able to break down the political issues involved. To that end, media, journalists, and even citizen journalists need to be trained on how to cover elections and how to deal with electoral-related disinformation campaigns, and also on how to check their sources of information, and how to protect themselves in case of threats and violence.

[00:15:03] Let's do a brief recap of the preventive measures we examine today. We talk about technological awareness and adaptability for electoral stakeholders, the promotion of dialogue, and social cohesion. We talk about civic education, voter education, and media and information literacy. We talk about the power of public information campaigns and about the importance of engagement and working with the media. In the next and final module, we will talk about identification, fact-checking, and monetary measures; corrective measures; regulatory and non-regulatory measures. Thank you very much for being here with us today. See you next week. Bye bye.