

UNDP/PNUD Welcome Video

[00:00:18] **Speaker 1** My name is Francine Pickup, and I'm the deputy director of the Bureau for Policy and Program Support at the United Nations Development Program. I'm very pleased to welcome you to this massive open online course on information and elections in the digital era. First, I would like to thank our partners at UNESCO's and the Ninth Center for Journalism at the in the Americas at the University of Texas for an excellent collaboration in organizing this course, as well as for their continued commitment to supporting journalism and information sharing during elections in these digital times. Let me start by outlining some of the thinking behind the cooperation between UNESCO's the Knight Center and UNDP on information and elections in the digital era. From a wider governance perspective. Democratic governance across the globe is under increasing pressure. Trust and social contracts are fraying from a wide range of issues, from economic contractions due to the COVID 19 pandemic and a growing debt crisis, to the rapid pace of technological change and people's growing dissatisfaction with the status quo, including the real or perceived underperformance of their governments and the lack of trust in elections as mechanisms that can create the changes that people want to see. We therefore need to reimagine and reinvigorate political systems. We need public spheres, public spaces that are truly open and inclusive. If we are to reduce polarization, reverse the erosion of trust in institutions, including electoral institutions, and reinvigorate social contracts. Accuracy and trustworthiness plays a crucial role in reestablishing trust and needs to be protected. The open exchange of information and space for debate and dialog around competing ideas is fundamental to the democratic process. Information exchange is the lifeblood of elections as the result of digitalization, opportunities to seek, receive and impart political information and share ideas between citizens, between politicians and political parties are unprecedented, with information related to elections flowing faster and easier than ever before. But despite these opportunities, today's information ecosystem is not enabling this critical exchange. The legitimacy of the democratic process can be marred by unverified information, as well as manipulated and polluted by disinformation. Hate speech is also finding a fertile ground in this new information ecosystem. These undermine effective governance and social cohesion and also can result in online and offline violence. Manipulations, intimidation and interferences in elections are not new, but they have evolved and are now amplified by low cost, easily accessible digital technologies. So how can we safeguard integrity and credibility of electoral processes while at the same time protecting the information value chain? Finding appropriate responses to this is not an easy task and there are no readymade solutions. Given the complex nature of these challenges and the linkages between elections and other areas of governance, it is really important to approach electoral assistance in a more integrated in a more integrated way as part of a broader set of governance strategies, integrating areas such as parliamentary assistance, promoting greater participation of women and young people, ensuring persons with disabilities are not left out. And we need to support information, integrity in electoral processes, which is why we are here today. As a lead agency supporting governance and electoral assistance globally. UNDP has been requested to accompany many electoral processes over the years. More than 50 annually. In fact, a quarter of all official development assistance or ODA for elections globally is channeled through UNDP. According to figures from OECD during the period 22003 to 20 and as the main implementer of UN electoral assistance. UNDP has witnessed firsthand how elections have evolved in the digital area and what adjustments electoral management bodies and electoral stakeholders have had to make to respond to the resulting opportunities and challenges. This MOOC includes some of the questions raised and the lessons that we've learned from these experiences, which can contribute together to developing appropriate responses from various stakeholders. It identifies potential entry

points for cooperation between social media companies, electoral management bodies, electoral observers, journalists, civil society bloggers, and other electoral stakeholders who all have an important role to play from developing long term information literacy and civic engagement and education campaigns to using digital technologies in a responsible manner to establishing fact finding services. Look, for instance, to Zambia, where the organization panels used a UNDP supported fact checking tool to combat the spread of false narratives ahead of the August 2021 elections. The fact finding tool combined new technologies like artificial intelligence and machine learning with in-person fact checking. We'll look to the Supervisory Commission for elections in Lebanon, which used digital media monitoring for the first time. With the support of UNDP. The Commission analyzed more than 15,000 article posts and tweets manually to detect hate speech, online violence against women and disinformation, and to monitor campaign spending ahead of the May 2022 general elections. This initiative helped the supervisory commission in Lebanon to spot more than 700 electoral violations, which are now being referred to the Publications Court. This online course is designed to enhance the contribution of a wide range of stakeholders to an information ecosystem conducive to inclusive, transparent and credible elections based on democratic dialog. We expect it to support electoral stakeholders in harnessing the new opportunities for digital technologies while at the same time remaining vigilant to the emerging threats, contributing to the legitimacy of electoral processes and strengthening trust in democratic processes and institutions. Thank you.