

RECCOMENDATIONS

ICDC Regional Conference, “Synergies Between Civil Society and Media From Fragmented Voices to Collective Resilience”

Chişinău, Moldova, 27 November 2025

Panel 1: Experiences on the ground – civil society and media synergies.

Panel 1 highlighted first-hand information of how Moldovan civil society and media contributed to safeguarding the information space during the 2025 parliamentary elections. The discussion brought together seven speakers from various organizations, including ICDC members and partners. They shared lessons learned, concrete examples of coordination models, practical approaches, challenges faced, and their views on the key priorities that the CSO and media community should pursue going forward. **Key recommendations emerging from the Panel 1 discussions:**

1. Proactive and strategic communication. Civil society must move beyond reactive fact-checking. Evidence shows it is not enough. All CSOs and media actors should adopt a proactive communication model - one that integrates counter-speech, pre-bunking, and the early seeding of accurate, positive narratives before disinformation takes hold. To enable this shift, targeted training programs for CSO and media staff, as well as volunteers, should be prioritized and systematically supported.

2. Audience-centered, contextual messaging. To strengthen Moldova’s information resilience, media and civil society need to fully embrace audience-centered communication. This begins with producing content that truly speaks to people’s realities. Youth respond to fast, creative infotainment; minorities engage more deeply with multilingual messaging; and sometimes humor is the only tool that can cut through sensitive or polarizing issues. Meeting audiences “where they are” - culturally, linguistically, and generationally - must become a universal practice, not an exception.

But relevance alone is not enough. Every communication effort should be guided by solid evidence. Tracking who we reach, how they engage, and whether their behavior changes allows us to identify real needs and spot the information gaps where malign actors thrive. Building strong monitoring and evaluation systems is essential for refining tactics, scaling what works, and tailoring approaches to different regions or demographic groups.

Some communities require special attention. In places like Transnistria and Gagauzia, deeply rooted narratives and strong Soviet nostalgia mean that traditional messaging often falls flat. These audiences need tailored interventions built on in-depth research - blending security-related explanations with relatable stories, humor, and formats that reduce emotional resistance.

Growing and maintaining an audience also demands creativity. Infotainment, platform-specific content, and charismatic local personalities have proven particularly effective. Media and CSOs should continue experimenting with the platforms that target groups actually use - TikTok, Instagram, and Russian-language channels - while investing in high-quality content that keeps people coming back.

At the same time, the role of journalism must evolve. Contextual journalism needs to remain at the center of public communication so that people understand not only what is happening around them, but why it matters. When this is combined with strong investigative reporting, shared across outlets and enriched with human stories, the impact multiplies. Joint storytelling between media and CSOs can significantly increase credibility, reach, and public trust.

3. Grassroots engagement. National-level actors cannot limit their work to urban centers; true impact requires reaching rural and remote communities. Building strong, lasting partnerships with local CSOs and media is essential to achieve this. Regional networks must be further developed and sustained to deliver face-to-face campaigns, community discussions, and participatory initiatives such as local forums, theater performances, and workshops. Engagement should not be limited to the immediate run-up to elections - it must begin early, fostering trust, awareness, and resilient information environments well in advance.

4. Institutionalized crisis response. Effective crisis communication requires strong coordination across all levels. Rapid-response cells and crisis communication units must work together to deliver

consistent messaging during disinformation spikes. Formalized crisis response mechanisms with clearly defined roles are essential to ensure swift and coherent action. At the same time, personnel should receive dedicated training in crisis communication, and collaboration between CSOs and media must be systematically integrated into state policies to strengthen national resilience.

5. Coordination and division of labor. Overlapping roles and uncoordinated donor efforts often undermine effectiveness and contribute to burnout among civil society and media actors. To address this, it is essential to map the strengths of CSOs and media partners and assign roles that leverage their core capacities. Donors should prioritize funding capacity-building initiatives before expecting new outputs, ensuring organizations have the skills and resources to deliver effectively. This approach of “skill matching” allows each actor to focus on what they do best, maximizing collective impact.

6. Continuous campaign mindset. Malign actors operate without regard for project timelines or funding cycles, which means that support for media and civil society must be sustained over the long term. Short, intense campaigns may create stress, burnout, and high staff turnover within NGOs, ultimately undermining impact. Instead, long-term strategies and multi-year programs - ideally funded over 2–3 years or more with predictable timelines - are essential to ensure organizational stability and meaningful results. NGOs should integrate long-term monitoring, evaluation, and strategic planning into their operations, allowing them to anticipate challenges, refine approaches, and strengthen resilience over time.

7. Strengthen coordination outside the election cycles. Relationships between CSOs, media, state institutions, and international partners create the infrastructure necessary for coordinated action. These value-based partnerships must be continuously nurtured, with transparency, common objectives, and regular communication to ensure that synergy persists well beyond election periods. Networks should remain flexible yet dependable, ready to respond quickly when threats emerge.

Civil society and independent media share a mutually reinforcing relationship: CSOs generate research, data, and content, while media amplify these insights to wide audiences. Strengthening and formalizing partnerships between NGOs and media outlets is essential to ensure rapid, high-quality dissemination of accurate information. Joint content production - including interviews, short videos, and infographics - should be encouraged, particularly during critical periods.

Disinformation does not only surge during elections; it spikes during reforms, crises, and policy shifts. By providing timely and accurate interpretations of government actions, CSOs and media can foster public understanding, build resilience, and cultivate trust well before crises arise.

Panel 2: International perspectives and regional lessons.

Panel 2 broadened its focus beyond Moldova, examining how the country’s approaches to countering foreign information manipulation and interference could inform strategies across the wider region. It also explored regional perspectives on what worked in Moldova and what should be prioritized moving forward. The session brought together experts from six countries- Poland, Georgia, Ukraine, Romania, Latvia, and Lithuania. **Key recommendations emerging from the Panel 2 discussions:**

1. Representative of Poland emphasized the importance of technical preparedness in countering foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI). Moldova’s existing Techniques, Tactics, and Procedures (TTPs) were recognized as effective and internationally replicable. The recommendation is to formalize and scale these TTPs, ensuring they are continuously updated to respond to emerging Russian methods, and to share these approaches with regional partners. Strengthening cross-border cooperation mechanisms was another priority. Structured partnerships with countries facing similar threats, including joint early-warning systems, coordinated crisis simulations, and multilateral intelligence-sharing networks, were recommended to enhance preparedness.

Poland also suggested that technological disruption capabilities should be improved to identify, flag, and limit hostile platforms through regulatory updates and partnerships with technology companies. In addition, investment in cyber and platform monitoring should be expanded, leveraging AI-based

detection, scraping, and trend tracking to prioritize real-time analysis of coordinated inauthentic behavior on social media.

Building resilience through risk awareness campaigns was another recommendation. Given that Russian psychological operations often use identical narratives across countries, integrating comparative examples from Poland, Ukraine, and the Baltic states into Moldovan public communication can help highlight patterns and reduce their impact. Finally, Poland urged Moldova to sustain long-term strategic communication investment, moving beyond isolated campaigns to integrate education, societal resilience, institutional capacity, and international support into a cohesive, multi-year approach.

2. Representative of Lithuania focused on strengthening collaboration networks. Moldova's civil society-media coalitions already provide a solid base, but institutionalizing these networks was recommended to ensure continuous, coordinated action. Practical trainings were highlighted as essential. Moldovan NGOs and journalists should participate in drills and coordination exercises, either led by Baltic partners or jointly organized, to gain hands-on experience in realistic crisis scenarios, preparing them to act effectively under pressure.

Education and media literacy were emphasized as central to long-term resilience. Lithuania also recommended supporting civil society-driven campaigns through initiatives like volunteer networks modeled on the Baltic "Elves," who actively monitor, debunk, and proactively counter disinformation, complementing official efforts and fostering community engagement.

3. Representative of Latvia highlighted the need to expand media literacy campaigns to older adults, particularly Russian-speaking communities who are highly active voters. Outreach through trusted local channels such as community centers, churches, and television was recommended to maximize impact. Latvia also emphasized engaging new digital platforms wisely. Moldova should maintain a presence on platforms like TikTok and Telegram, ensuring content is credible, authentic, and adapted to each platform, rather than forced or imitating populist styles.

Latvia further recommended promoting positive, forward-looking narratives. Messaging should emphasize tangible benefits of EU integration and other constructive societal developments, reducing reliance on negative campaigns or simply countering disinformation. Bridging the gap between state institutions and media/NGOs was also highlighted. Government institutions need to better understand the role and functioning of independent media and civil society, while protocols, quality standards, and protective measures for journalists should be developed to foster trust and reduce friction. This ensures that media and NGOs are perceived as partners in resilience rather than adversaries.

4. Representative of Romania stressed the importance of permanent monitoring and targeting of coordinated disinformation networks. Moldova should identify networks of pages and profiles that repeatedly push the same messages and take action even outside election periods. Romania recommended close collaboration with Moldova, exchanging information on threats, conducting joint initiatives, including Moldovan experts in conferences, and using lessons learned to inform regional efforts, such as those applied to elections in the Czech Republic. Additionally, Romania highlighted the use of data-driven audience targeting for positive messaging. Civil society and media actors should apply micro-targeting techniques similar to those used by disinformation actors, using audience analysis to craft accurate, engaging, and pro-democracy messages that resonate effectively with different groups.

5. Representative of Georgia focused on moving away from fear-based messaging, emphasizing communication that is positive, forward-looking, and grounded in optimism. Messaging should highlight tangible benefits for citizens and demonstrate constructive outcomes, strengthening both domestic resilience and regional influence. Georgia also recommended the establishment of permanent, cross-border strategic communication structures to replace ad hoc campaigns, ensuring sustained coordination in responding to disinformation.

6. Representative of Ukraine highlighted strengthening legal and institutional measures, reinforcing law-enforcement capacities, empowering electoral bodies, and targeting the networks behind disinformation rather than its content, all while maintaining strong coordination between government,

media, and civil society. Proactive, vulnerability-focused strategies were also recommended. Moldova should identify societal vulnerabilities that hostile actors, particularly Russia, might exploit and address them before manipulation occurs.

Panel 3: Women in politics and gendered disinformation.

Panel 3 examined how gendered disinformation affected women's political participation and public engagement. Speakers from both state institutions and civil society, representing Moldova and other countries, analyzed the ways in which hostile narratives, stereotypes, and targeted online attacks influenced the experiences of women candidates, elected officials, journalists, and activists during recent election cycles.

Key recommendations emerging from the Panel 3 discussions:

1. Strengthen women's solidarity and support networks. The panel emphasized the importance of building powerful networks of solidarity among women, noting that coordinated support can significantly reduce the impact of gender-based disinformation (GBD). Participants highlighted the need to reinforce women's leadership networks that provide mutual backing, enable coordinated public responses, and ensure that when one woman is targeted, others can immediately amplify support. These networks should also be linked with regional and cross-sector platforms to facilitate rapid exchange of best practices in countering GBD.

Strengthening support structures at the local level is equally important. Councils, NGOs, and community organizations can help address region-specific biases and foster more inclusive attitudes. Schools, religious institutions, and community leaders should be engaged to promote fair, equitable perceptions of women's capabilities and public roles.

Speakers also stressed the crucial role of male allies. Expanding and recognizing men's involvement in creating gender-balanced professional and political environments helps normalize shared leadership and reduces exclusion. Finally, broader cross-country cooperation between civil society, media, and StratCom actors is needed to address the regional patterns of gender-targeted manipulation that often cross borders.

2. Continued GBD resilience building. Participants underscored the need for sustained and structured communication strategies specifically designed to counter gendered misinformation. Moldova should invest in ongoing campaigns that encourage women's active participation in political, civic, and professional life - not only during election periods. Evidence-based communication materials must be developed to challenge claims that women are "unfit" for leadership roles or relegated to lower-level positions.

Crucially, messages about gender equality should be framed as rooted in shared societal values, rather than introduced as foreign or externally imposed concepts. Integrating GBD-awareness modules into leadership and professional development programs would further prepare women and men alike to recognize and withstand targeted disinformation attacks.

Speakers also suggested establishing rapid-response teams capable of debunking false narratives targeting women leaders. Strengthening legislation and enforcement against sexist attacks and online harassment remains essential to creating a safer public environment for women's participation.

3. Reduce double standards in public visibility and media coverage. A key recommendation focused on reducing double standards in how women are portrayed in the media and across digital platforms. Editorial guidelines must be reinforced to ensure that coverage avoids amplifying sexist or discriminatory narratives and remains focused on substantive issues rather than stereotypes. Journalists should receive training to help them recognize gender bias and avoid inadvertently reinforcing harmful narratives.

Online spaces require active moderation to filter sexist, abusive, or misleading comments that often shape public perception. Media outlets should also avoid echoing harmful content even when reporting critically on it - responsible framing is necessary to prevent further amplification.

Visibility is another crucial factor. Increasing the presence of women experts across different sectors, and maintaining accessible expert databases for journalists, can help shift public perception and normalize women's authority in technical and policy fields.

Given that platforms like Facebook, Telegram, TikTok, and YouTube are major vectors for sexist narratives, enhanced monitoring and collaboration are needed. Fact-checkers, civil society, and StratCom teams should work together to document, analyze, and respond to harmful trends. Regional data-sharing mechanisms will help track cross-border GBD campaigns and identify emerging patterns early.

4. Counter AI-driven manipulation and gendered misrepresentation. The rise of AI-generated content has amplified the sophistication and scale of attacks targeting women leaders and experts. Participants highlighted the need to support civil society and media in monitoring AI-enhanced manipulation, including deepfakes and altered images designed to damage reputations or spread false narratives.

To counter these threats, the public must be equipped with accessible guidance on how to verify online materials and report abusive, manipulated, or misleading content. Digital literacy programs are essential to help people recognize AI-generated misinformation, understand its risks, and avoid unintentionally spreading harmful narratives—especially those targeting women.