

HATEFUL DISCRIMINATORY DISCOURSE ONLINE IN Albania

Annual Report 2024

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The aim of Living Safely in a Digital World (LIFE) project, proposed by this consortium is to increase the resilience of the young generation on facing the risks of the digitalization and its impact in their everyday life through empowering youth organizations to be involved in policy dialogue and use non-formal learning in their work with the young people.

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1. Executive Summary

In 2024, the Albanian Media Authority for Digital (AMAD) carried out a nationwide study to examine the state of digital safety and the growing prevalence of hateful and discriminatory discourse (HDD) in Albania. Drawing on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, including **surveys, focus groups, desk research, and continuous online monitoring**, the study offers an in-depth look into public attitudes, online behaviors, and institutional efforts to address digital harms.

The findings paint a detailed picture of Albania's digital landscape, where online participation is high, but exposure to harmful and discriminatory content is becoming alarmingly frequent. The study reached a wide demographic, with particularly strong representation among young people aged 15 to 29, who accounted for 38.1% of all respondents. This group, highly active in digital spaces, reflects both the opportunities and vulnerabilities of Albania's online community. Nearly 44.2% of participants reported spending several hours daily on social media and online platforms, emphasizing the central role these spaces play in everyday life.

The study also revealed an unsettling trend: a sharp rise in online hate and discriminatory discourse. Over a third of respondents (35.7%) reported encountering HDD on a daily basis, while nearly two-thirds (64%) experienced it regularly. Even more concerning, three out of four respondents (75.5%) said they had personally experienced hate speech online. A vast majority (82.3%) believe such discourse is increasing, reflecting growing public awareness and anxiety about the normalization of hate in digital spaces.

When identifying the main sources of this harmful content, respondents pointed to several influential sectors. Reality shows were cited by an overwhelming 98.6% of participants as a key driver of discriminatory narratives, followed closely by social media influencers (96.2%) and politicians (84.5%). These findings highlight how media and public figures, through both entertainment and political communication, shape public discourse and often contribute to the spread of division and hostility online.

The human impact of this environment is significant. Many respondents reported strong emotional reactions to online hate speech: 36.1% said it made them feel upset or sad, 24.5% felt scared or threatened, and 16.5% expressed a desire to take action or join awareness initiatives. These responses underscore that hate and discrimination online are not abstract issues, as they carry real emotional and psychological consequences, eroding individual well-being and social cohesion.

AMAD's **desk research** and media monitoring further reinforced these findings. Gender-based and misogynistic content emerged as the most common form of HDD, frequently seen in public statements, entertainment programs, and online commentary. Ethnic and nationalist hate speech was also prominent, particularly in sports and political contexts, while sensationalist media practices and low digital literacy amplified harmful narratives. Although AMAD's interventions, ranging from case referrals and removal requests to calls for public apologies, produced some positive outcomes, the results were uneven, revealing the need for stronger and more coordinated institutional mechanisms.

Based on these insights, the study puts forward several key recommendations. First, digital literacy and safety education should be strengthened nationwide, equipping both young and older generations with the tools to navigate online risks responsibly. Second, regulatory frameworks must be reinforced to hold media outlets, influencers, and digital platforms accountable for the spread of hate speech. Third, more attention should be directed toward supporting victims, including accessible reporting channels, counseling services, and awareness campaigns to mitigate the mental health impact of online abuse.

At the same time, political and media actors must take greater responsibility for their language and behavior, fostering a culture of ethical communication and respect in public discourse. Finally, citizens themselves should be encouraged to play an active role in countering hate, through community engagement, online activism, and advocacy for safer digital spaces.

AMAD’s 2024 Annual Study exposes an urgent need for comprehensive and coordinated action against the rise of hate and discrimination in Albania’s digital ecosystem. By combining education, regulation, support, and civic engagement, Albania can move toward a more respectful, inclusive, and secure online environment for all.

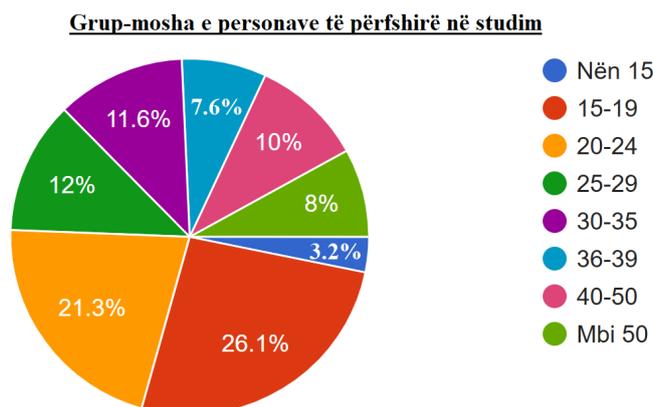
2. Survey and focus group results

The survey collected both quantitative and qualitative data, providing a well-rounded understanding of the subject matter.

a) Quantitative data on demography

The survey targeted respondents across different age groups, ensuring a diverse and representative sample. The distribution of respondents by age group is as follows:

- 20-24 years: 21.3%
- 15-19 years: 26.1%
- 25-29 years: 12%
- 30-35 years: 11.6%
- 36-39 years: Data for this group was slightly lower, with responses included in the broader categories.
- 40-50 years: The percentage of respondents in this group also formed a key part of the overall survey data.
- Over 50 years: Represented a smaller portion of the survey population.



These percentages reflect the age diversity of the participants, with significant representation from younger age groups, particularly between 15-29 years (38.1%), indicating a strong engagement from the youth demographic. This demographic breakdown is visualized in the accompanying graphic, providing a clearer view of the distribution.

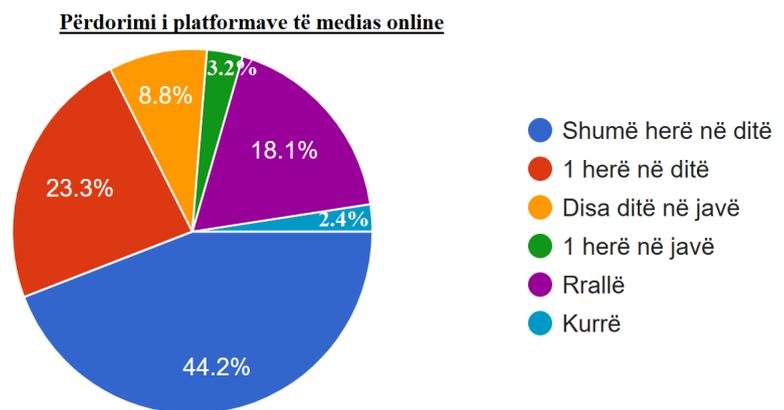
b) Qualitative data on demography

The qualitative aspect of the survey was based on open-ended questions, allowing respondents to share detailed opinions, experiences, and concerns regarding digital safety. This data revealed several important themes, including:

- Respondents of different age groups demonstrated varying levels of **awareness regarding digital risks/ threats**, with younger age groups indicating higher levels of concern about online privacy and cybersecurity.
- **Online behavior and safety practices** while many respondents expressed concerns about their digital footprint, particularly in the context of social media. Younger participants, especially those in the 15-29 group, were more vocal about the challenges they face in maintaining privacy.
- **Access to digital education** as several participants highlighted the need for more digital literacy programs, with a focus on safe online practices and cybersecurity measures. The majority of those who were above the age of 40 emphasized the importance of such education for older generations who may not be as digitally fluent.

c) Online media and social network usage

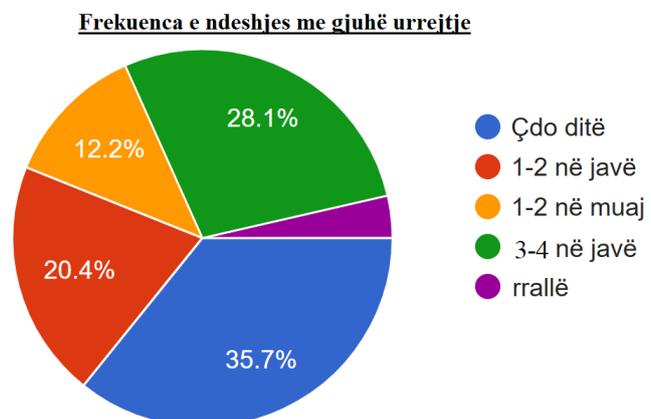
The survey found that a significant portion of respondents, 44.2%, spend several hours daily on media platforms and social networks. This highlights the pervasive role of digital platforms in daily life, particularly among younger age groups. Social media usage was a central aspect of the survey, with respondents across all age groups indicating their involvement in various online platforms.



d) Experience with Hateful Discriminatory Discourse (HDD)

The survey also assessed the frequency of encounters with HDD, an issue of growing concern in digital spaces. The findings revealed the following:

- 35.7% of respondents reported encountering HDD on a daily basis. This suggests a significant presence of harmful online discourse, which is especially concerning in terms of its regularity and impact on users' digital experiences.
- 28.1% of respondents said they encounter HDD 3-4 times per week, indicating that such discourse is a



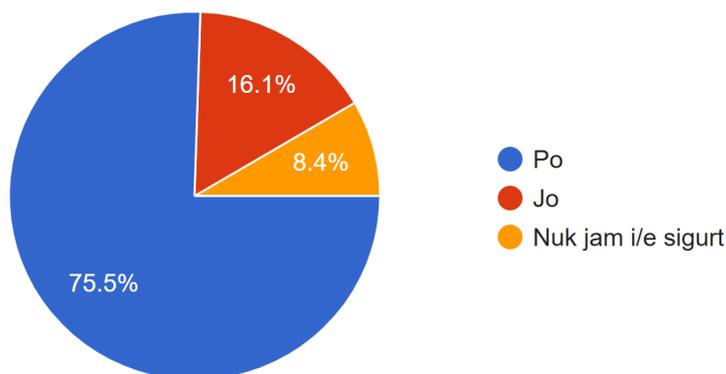
frequent, ongoing issue even if not occurring daily.

These findings underscore the troubling prevalence of hateful and discriminatory content in digital environments, with nearly 64% of respondents experiencing it on a regular basis. This data highlights the urgent need for interventions to address online harassment and discrimination, particularly within the media and social network spaces that dominate daily digital interactions.

e) Personal experience with hate speech

A striking 75.5% of respondents reported having directly experienced hate speech online. This indicates a significant and widespread exposure to harmful digital content, underscoring the severity of the issue across various demographics. The experience of hate speech was not limited to specific age groups but was prevalent across a broad spectrum of respondents, reflecting a serious concern for digital safety and well-being.

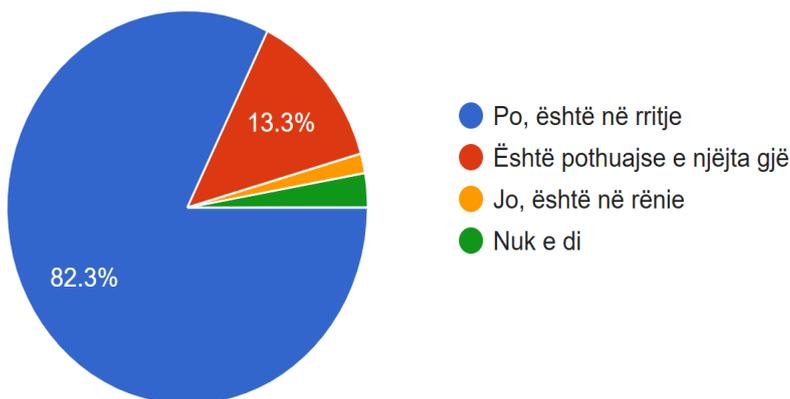
Jam përballur direkt me gjuhë urrejtje online



f) Perception of presence of HDD online

An overwhelming 82.3% of respondents stated that they believe HDD is increasing over time. This perception reflects the growing concern around the normalization of hate speech and discriminatory behavior in digital spaces. The fact that such a large proportion of respondents noted the rise in HDD highlights a broader trend that may require systemic responses from policymakers, tech companies, and digital platforms to curb its spread.

Situata aktuale e gjuhës së urrejtjes online



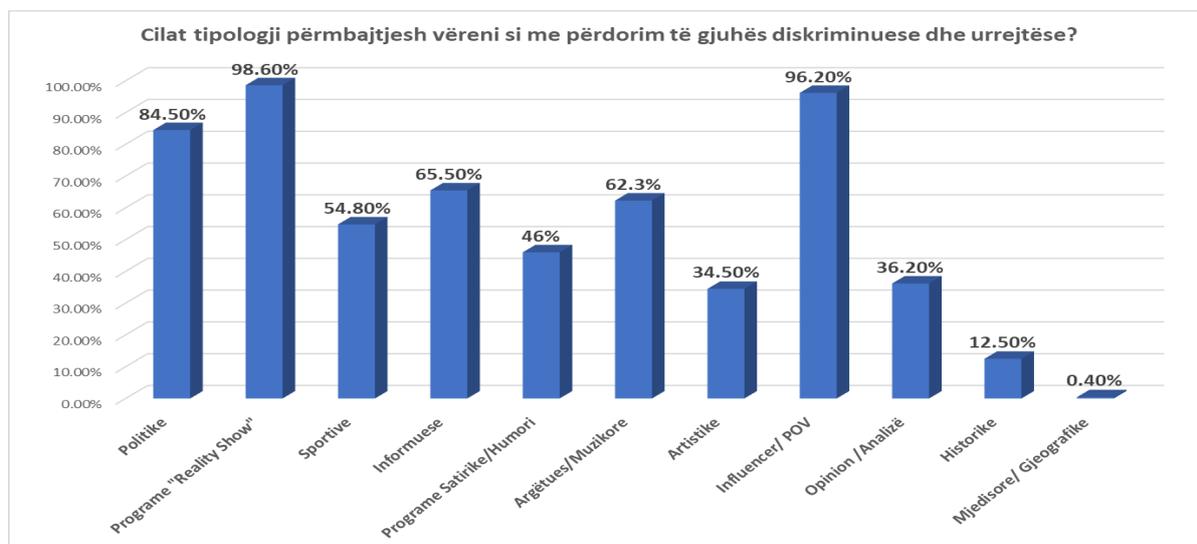
These findings emphasize not only the personal impact of hate speech on individuals but also a growing awareness of its escalation in the digital landscape. The data further highlights the urgent need for stronger regulations, digital literacy initiatives, and interventions aimed at reducing hate speech and promoting a safer online environment.

g) Sources of Hate Discriminatory Discourse (HDD)

The findings show that certain groups and platforms are seen as significant contributors to the spread of HDD:

- Politics/Politicians

A notable 84.5% of respondents identified politics and politicians as a primary source of HDD. This suggests that political discourse, whether in public forums or on social media, is often marked by divisive, harmful, and discriminatory rhetoric, which exacerbates online tensions and contributes to the overall increase in hate speech.



- Reality Shows

An even higher proportion, 98.6%, pointed to reality shows as another major source of HDD. The sensationalist and often confrontational nature of reality TV, particularly when dealing with sensitive topics or individuals from marginalized groups, seems to be fueling negative online discussions and amplifying harmful stereotypes.

- Influencers on Social Media

A significant 96.2% of respondents highlighted social media influencers, particularly on platforms like TikTok, as key drivers of HDD. The massive reach of influencers, especially those who engage in controversial or provocative content, contributes to the spread of harmful narratives and discriminatory behavior, especially among younger audiences.

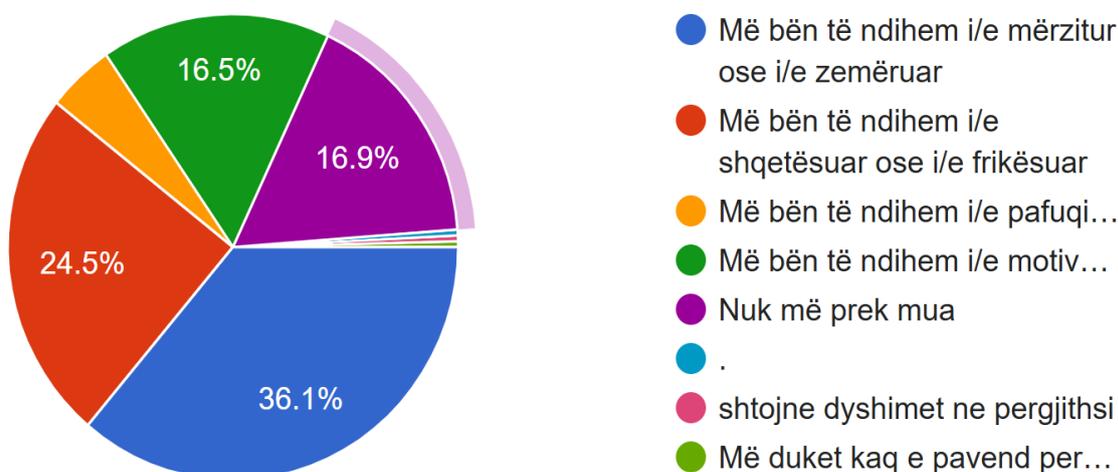
These results indicate that while politicians, reality shows, and social media influencers are identified as major sources of HDD, each plays a distinct role in shaping public discourse and influencing online behaviors. The widespread recognition of these groups as key contributors to hate speech highlights the need for targeted interventions that address these high-profile sources in order to combat the growing trend of online discrimination and harmful rhetoric.

h) Emotional and psychological reactions to HDD

A significant 36.1% of respondents reported feeling upset and sad when encountering HDD online. This emotional reaction underscores the personal distress caused by exposure to harmful and discriminatory content, highlighting the emotional toll that online hate speech can take on individuals.

24.5% of respondents indicated that they feel scared, worried, and threatened when confronted with HDD. This suggests that for many, encountering hate speech goes beyond emotional discomfort, triggering feelings of insecurity and fear for their personal safety, particularly in an online environment where anonymity can heighten the sense of threat.

Përjetimet nga përballja me gjuhë urrejtje



16.5% of respondents reported feeling the urge to react or join awareness actions in response to HDD. This indicates that a portion of the respondents sees an opportunity to address the issue actively, either through online advocacy or participating in initiatives aimed at raising awareness and combating hate speech.

16.9% of respondents stated that they are not bothered by HDD because they are not directly attacked. While this group may not feel personally affected, it still reflects a subset of individuals who might be less sensitive to the content or perhaps view such occurrences as a normal part of online interaction.

These findings highlight the varying emotional and psychological effects that online HDD has on individuals, from sadness and fear to a proactive desire to address the issue. The data emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive online environment and taking action to reduce the negative mental health impacts associated with digital hate speech.

3. Desk research and monitoring results

This analysis reviews the cases collected by AMAD in 2024 and identifies recurring patterns, affected target groups, platform distributions, institutional responses, and gaps. The evidence shows (1) gender- and misogyny-based HDD is the single most frequent category in the dataset; (2) ethnic/nationalist HDD appears strongly in sports and public-figure incidents; (3) media-driven sensationalism and poor media literacy amplify harmful narratives; and (4) AMAD's interventions regularly involve referral to national oversight bodies (NHRI / Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination; Audiovisual Media Authority), content removal requests, and calls for public apologies — with mixed success. Representative cases and recommendations are below. **(In ANNEX there is the detailed table of each case with description, analysis, and links)**

3.1 Dominant HDD categories

- Gender-based HDD / Misogyny

The largest and most consistently recurrent theme. Examples include public figures making misogynistic statements on national TV (Bujar Kapexhiu), sexist harassment in reality TV (Big Brother VIP), targeted harassment of a female referee (Emanuela Rusta), and violent victim-blaming after image-based abuse (Altin Çoku / Sibela Abedini case). AMAD recorded interventions or referrals for many of these.

- Ethnic / Nationalist HDD

Several high-profile incidents touch ethnic tensions, e.g., comments by Kosovar actor Osman Azemi that provoked cross-border dispute, a journalist threatened for wearing a Serbian flag T-shirt (Ervin Baku), and nationalist chants by a national football player at UEFA (Mirlind Daku). These incidents often become amplified through fan networks and social media.

- Sexual orientation / LGBTI+ discriminatory language

Recorded via statements by political actors (Silvana Caka's protest remark) that use derogatory slurs and encourage hostile discourse.

- Media literacy failures and sensationalism

Online outlets and social media accounts repeatedly use clickbait, moral-shaming formats, or misleading headlines (examples: JOQ, Top Channel headlines vs. Kostana Morava, NOA headline highlighting a driver's gender) that catalyse HDD and harassment. AMAD labels many of these as media-literacy/ethics problems rather than isolated hate incidents.

3.2 Platforms and amplification dynamics

- Mainstream broadcast and social platforms hybrid

Many incidents originate on TV or in mainstream outlets and then spread via YouTube, Instagram, TikTok and comment threads (e.g., Kapexhiu Top-Channel remarks, podcasts that go viral). This hybrid dispersal increases reach and the speed of escalation.

- User-driven amplification

Even when the original content is removed (e.g., podcast clip taken down), reposts and snippets on social networks persist, prolonging harm. AMAD notes repeated reposts after removal.

3.3 Targets and harms

Target groups include women (professionals, public figures, private individuals), ethnic minorities (Romani/Egyptian), political actors, athletes, and LGBTI+ people. Harms range from reputational damage and public shaming to direct threats, doxxing, and (in at least one case) events linked to a person's suicide. The database documents both insulting discourse and material harms (threats, blackmail).

3.4 Institutional responses and case outcomes

AMAD took actions through the referral to national institutions (Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, Audiovisual Media Authority), phone outreach to content producers requesting removal and trainings, monitoring, and calls for public apologies. Several cases were “addressed” or “solved” (public apology by Kapexhiu; removal of podcast link), while others remain recorded/ongoing or under monitoring. This shows active engagement but also reveals variable enforcement or remediation outcomes.

3.5 Patterns and risks

Repeat offenders and normalization may bring recurrence of misogynistic and sensationalist framing by the same outlets and public figures suggests normalization within media culture.

Platform takedowns are inconsistent; removal of content at source does not stop re-shares it just presents the moderation gap in such cases.

Sporting events, entertainment, politics and news media are interconnected vectors for HDD, thus are needed cross-sector spillover and not just interventions limited to one sector which have limited effect.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The 2024 AMAD Online Monitoring Annual Report in Albania provides valuable insights into the state of digital safety, the prevalence of hateful discriminatory discourse (HDD), and the impact of such discourse on mental health and well-being. The report highlights critical trends in online media usage, the personal experiences of individuals with hate speech, and the emotional toll of encountering discriminatory content. Below are the key findings of this Annual Study report.

4.1 Conclusions

The 2024 AMAD National Study on Digital Safety and Hateful Discriminatory Discourse (HDD) provides a clear and comprehensive picture of the challenges facing Albania's online environment. The findings reveal a society that is highly digitally engaged, but increasingly exposed to harmful and discriminatory behaviors in digital spaces.

The study confirms that exposure to hate speech and discriminatory discourse is widespread and persistent, affecting users across all demographics. More than one-third of respondents encounter HDD daily, while nearly two-thirds experience it on a regular basis. The fact that three out of four individuals have personally experienced hate speech highlights the seriousness and pervasiveness of the problem.

Equally concerning is the public perception that hate and discrimination online are increasing, signaling a growing normalization of hostility and intolerance in digital communication. The emotional and psychological impact of this exposure is significant: many respondents reported feelings of sadness, anxiety, or fear when confronted with online hate, while others expressed frustration and a desire for change.

AMAD's monitoring and desk research reinforce these concerns. The data reveal that gender-based and misogynistic discourse remains the most common form of HDD, followed by ethnic and nationalist hate speech. Media sensationalism, inadequate digital literacy, and inconsistent regulation further amplify these trends. Reality shows, political discourse, and influencer content were identified as major contributors, shaping online narratives that often perpetuate division and discrimination.

While AMAD's interventions—such as referrals to national oversight bodies, requests for content removal, and public apology initiatives—have produced some positive outcomes, results remain uneven. This indicates the need for stronger institutional coordination, clearer accountability mechanisms, and a more systematic approach to countering harmful digital behavior.

The findings demonstrate that digital safety is both a social and institutional challenge, requiring the active participation of policymakers, media actors, educational institutions, and civil society to foster a safer and more inclusive digital environment in Albania.

4.2 Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, AMAD proposes the following strategic actions to strengthen digital safety, reduce hate and discrimination online, and build long-term digital resilience:

1. Strengthen digital literacy and education

Develop nationwide digital literacy programs that promote safe, respectful, and informed online behavior. Such programs should target both youth and older generations, focusing on topics such as online privacy, cyberbullying, hate speech recognition, and media ethics. Partnerships with schools, universities, and community organizations will be essential to make these efforts sustainable.

2. Reinforce regulation and platform accountability

Introduce clearer and more effective regulatory standards for identifying, reporting, and addressing hate speech online. Strengthen collaboration between regulators, broadcasters, and digital platforms to ensure that harmful content is promptly removed and that those responsible for its spread are held accountable.

3. Support victims and promote mental well-being

Establish accessible mechanisms for reporting and psychological support for individuals affected by online hate. Create online help lines, counseling services, and awareness campaigns that highlight available resources. Strengthening legal protections and providing victim-centered assistance can help reduce the emotional toll of online abuse.

4. Encourage ethical political and media communication

Promote responsible communication among politicians, journalists, and influencers. Public discourse—both online and in traditional media—should be grounded in respect, factual accuracy, and social responsibility. Political parties and media organizations should adopt and enforce codes of conduct to discourage discriminatory or inflammatory language.

5. Foster civic engagement and collective action

Encourage citizen participation in efforts to combat hate speech through community-based initiatives, awareness campaigns, and online activism. The study shows that a portion of respondents are motivated to act against hate—this momentum should be supported and amplified through programs that promote digital citizenship and solidarity.

The AMAD's Annual Report Study 2024 reveals the critical need for comprehensive strategies to address the rise of hate speech and discriminatory discourse online. By focusing on education, regulation, support for victims, and responsible digital engagement, we can foster a safer and more inclusive digital environment for all users.