

# MONTHLY BRIEFING

With Selected Case Studies on  
Information Disorder in Ethiopia

Voice Up! Information for Peace (VIP) Project  
**Reporting Period:** August 16 – September 20, 2025



September, 2025

## Monthly Note

**“Information disorder in Ethiopia is no longer limited to politics; it now affects livelihoods, weakens trust, and threatens the safety of communities in everyday life.”**



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Between August 16 and September 20, 2025, Ethiopia faced a widening wave of information disorder that extended far beyond politics. Misinformation and disinformation now affect education, economic stability, digital safety, and public trust, disrupting livelihoods and weakening institutional credibility across the country.

This monthly briefing, produced under the Voice Up! Information for Peace (VIP) Project analyzes 11 major case studies verified through 24 trainee fact-checking reports and original Tikvah Ethiopia editorial sources, and audience feedback polls. Together, these cases demonstrate how false narratives, online scams, impersonation, and AI-generated visuals have evolved into interconnected threats to Ethiopia's information ecosystem.

During this reporting cycle, more than twenty misinformation incidents were documented across five key domains: governance, economy, education, technology, and gender. Generative AI tools emerged as a growing driver of visual propaganda, while fraud-based misinformation had the most direct impact on citizens' finances. Public assessment findings further revealed a striking gap between exposure and vulnerability: although fact-checkers primarily encountered political misinformation, ordinary users were more affected by scams and deceptive economic promises.

These findings underline a critical shift: misinformation in Ethiopia has become embedded in daily life rather than remaining confined to public discourse. The consequences are far-reaching, from economic exploitation through fake opportunities and digital fraud to the erosion of public trust caused by communication gaps within institutions. They also include growing polarization and fear, often amplified by AI-generated content and satire, as well as gender-based risks, where false job advertisements and online manipulation disproportionately target women.

The evidence presented here reinforces an urgent need for timely and transparent institutional communication to curb rumor-driven speculation, alongside strengthened digital literacy and fraud awareness initiatives, particularly targeting youth and job seekers. It also highlights the importance of developing AI content monitoring and regulatory frameworks in collaboration with technology partners, as well as establishing localized fact-checking networks that can effectively bridge national narratives with community-level realities.

Ultimately, this month's insights show that information disorder in Ethiopia is becoming systemic, adaptive, and multi-dimensional, demanding equally adaptive responses that blend policy reform, digital education, and local verification capacity.

# KEY FINDINGS

## Information Vacuums Enable Rumors

When government agencies delay or fragment public updates such as salary adjustments or exam results false narratives fill the gap. In some of the tracked incidents, misinformation began in the absence of timely official statements.

## Information Vacuums Enable Rumors

Some of the **major cases** featured AI-generated visuals that blurred truth and fiction, notably during the **Ethiopia-Eritrea Red Sea debate**. These synthetic images shaped perception faster than textual narratives, heightening polarization.

## Economic Vulnerability Fuels Fraud

Fake job offers, pyramid schemes, and banking scams continue to exploit trust and financial desperation. We have also identified scams as one of the most harmful misinformation they faced in September.

## Gender-Based Exploitation via Digital Platforms

False recruitment ads targeting young women exposed victims to harassment, extortion, and technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV). These findings call for cross-sector responses combining fact-checking with survivor support.

## Information Vacuums Enable Rumors

In sensitive cases (e.g. **Zewdu Haftu trial rumors**), community-based fact-checkers disproved false claims before they spread widely, underscoring the value of local presence and rapid verification networks.

## Trust Gaps Widen Between Media and Public

Audience perception data shows that citizens now rely more on peer-to-peer and Telegram sources than traditional media, signaling the urgent need to rebuild trust through transparent communication.

# APPROACH AND SOURCES

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This briefing was compiled during the project period (16 August – 20 September 2025) under the **Voice Up! Information for Peace (VIP)** Project, combining fact-checking, field reporting, original interviews, fact-checking submissions, audience input, and editorial analysis. It draws on verified inputs from **24 trained participants**, Tikvah Ethiopia’s editorial team, and cross-referenced media sources to capture how misinformation and disinformation circulated during this time.



## CORE INPUTS

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**Fact-checking reports from VIP trainees** – 24 participants submitted structured reports documenting viral claims, verification steps, and analysis. These reports formed a central input for the case studies presented here.

**Tikvah Ethiopia news and editorial resources** – published news, unpublished stories, and interviews, supported by monitoring teams and on-the-ground checks carried out by reporters.

**Media references** – additional context drawn from local and international outlets, used to cross-check narratives and highlight discrepancies.

**Polls and perceptions** – data from trainee polls and wider audience surveys provided insight into how misinformation is perceived and prioritized by different groups.

# EDITORIAL PROCESS

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All material was reviewed, cross-checked, and compiled through Tikvah Ethiopia's editorial workflow. The integration of trainee fact-checking reports and Tikvah Ethiopia's news reporting capacity ensured that both grassroots observations and institutional analysis were reflected in this briefing.

# CASE STUDIES

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The case studies in this briefing illustrate how misinformation, disinformation, scams, and propaganda manifest across different sectors of Ethiopian society. They capture a wide range of tactics from rumors and misleading media coverage to fraudulent schemes, impersonation, satire, and the accelerating influence of generative AI. Each case demonstrates not only how a narrative emerged and spread, but also its broader consequences for public trust, economic stability, and social cohesion. In total, 11 case studies are presented to highlight the breadth and diversity of these challenges.

# CASE STUDY 1:

## GERD Inauguration and the Spread of Misleading Narratives

The inauguration of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) was one of the most celebrated national events during this period. It dominated conversations in the country and drew wide coverage from international outlets as well. Yet, alongside the celebration came a flood of misleading and false stories that quickly captured public attention.

### Some of the claims that circulated included:

- The dam was producing much less energy than originally promised.
- The construction was of poor quality and posed dangers to downstream countries.
- That the United States had secretly funded the project - a rumor resurfacing from an old comment made by former U.S. President [Donald Trump](#), though repeatedly denied by Ethiopian officials.

The most sensitive claim was that 15,000 people had died over the 14 years of the GERD project. This number was linked to an interview with Ethiopia's Minister of Water and Energy, Dr. Habtamu Itefa, published in [The Reporter Magazine](#).

The Reporter's clarification: The magazine later explained that the phrase "while building the dam" had been misinterpreted. The deaths mentioned referred to the broader scope of the project, not fatalities on the construction site itself.

Conflicting responses: [BBC Amharic](#) cited a former Health, Safety, and Environment Coordinator for the main contractor, who dismissed the figure as baseless. The Minister's follow-up: In a later interview with DW Amharic, Dr. Itefa distanced himself from the figure, saying: "The media misinterpreted the news in terms of numbers and questions. Ask those numbers from the right body."

The Minister’s follow-up: In a later interview with [DW Amharic](#), Dr. Itefa distanced himself from the figure, saying: “The media misinterpreted the news in terms of numbers and questions. Ask those numbers from the right body.”

#### WHY IT MATTERS:

This case shows how a single phrase, taken out of context, can quickly snowball into a powerful narrative. Once repeated by multiple outlets, even questionable figures gain legitimacy in the public eye, making corrections slow and difficult to absorb.

## CASE STUDY 2: Salary Adjustment Rumors and Confusion

When the Ethiopian Civil Service Commission announced a new salary adjustment for public employees, it quickly became one of the most talked-about issues of the month. The news raised expectations across the country, but the lack of clear and timely details opened the door for rumors and false information to spread.

Not long after, fake salary scale documents began appearing on social media. Civil Service Commissioner [Mekuria Haile](#) publicly dismissed them, stressing that they were false and misleading.

As anticipation grew, another wave of rumors claimed that the adjustment had been postponed. [Meseret Media](#) even mentioned the Ministry of Finance as a source, saying there was no plan to delay. But this claim was never backed by other outlets or by official government pages. In reality, the position was already clear: the adjustment would be calculated from September but only paid out starting in October.

The confusion spilled into daily life. Some businesses raised prices prematurely, assuming salaries had already gone up. This sparked public frustration and led the government to issue [warnings](#) against such exploitative practices.

#### WHY IT MATTERS:

This case shows how gaps in official communication give space for rumors to grow. In this instance, the uncertainty not only misled people but also had real economic consequences, as families faced higher prices before any salary increase had actually reached them.

## CASE STUDY 3: Zewdu Haftu Killing and Prisoner Misinformation

The killing of Zewdu Haftu in Mekelle in 2023 became a long and painful symbol of frustration with the justice system. The trial was repeatedly delayed, and each postponement deepened public suspicion that outside pressure was influencing the process.

On July 11, 2025, the court finally sentenced the perpetrators to [life imprisonment](#), a ruling that drew widespread attention. But instead of bringing closure, new claims surfaced almost immediately. Social media posts began circulating, insisting that one of the convicted killers, Yared G/selase, had already been released from prison. The rumor spread quickly, feeding into anger that had been building during the long-delayed justice process.

Two members of the [VIP Project mentorship program](#) in Tigray looked into the claim. Participant Filimon Desta interviewed Amanuel Feseha, Deputy Commissioner of Mekelle Prison, who confirmed: “The prisoner is here and will remain until his sentence is completed.” Additional checks, including follow-up with Tikvah Ethiopia contacts in Mekelle, also confirmed that the convict remained in custody.

#### WHY IT MATTERS:

This case shows how justice-related misinformation can easily trigger strong emotions. In a context where trust in institutions is already fragile, even an unfounded rumor can appear credible. It also underlines the value of local fact-checking, where timely efforts by trainees and reporters helped prevent further escalation of false narratives.

## CASE STUDY 4:

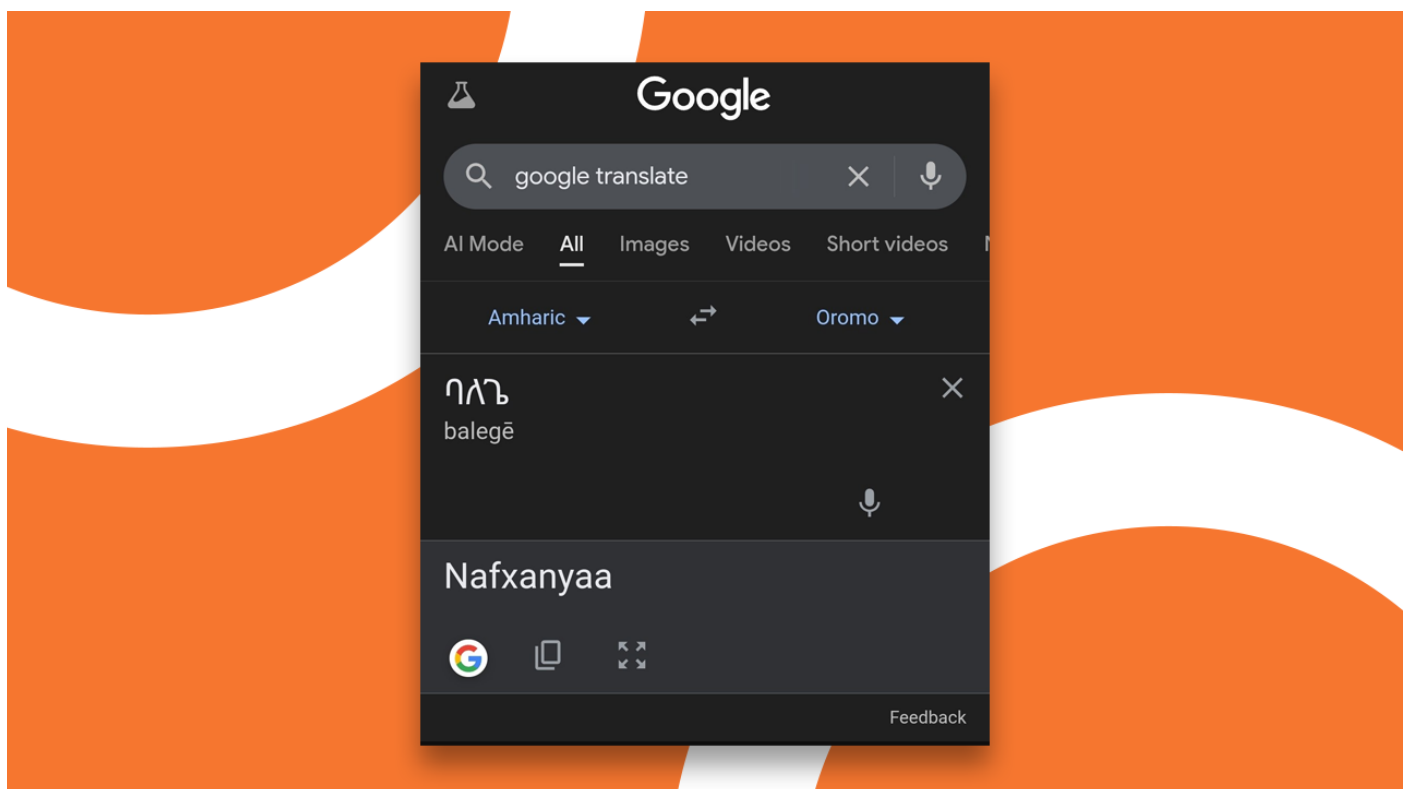
# Mistranslation of “ባለጌ” and the Learning Curve for Fact-Checkers

During the VIP training, participants uncovered a striking problem with Google Translate. The Amharic word “ባለጌ”, which simply means “rude,” was mistranslated into Oromo as “Nafxanyaa” on the web version of the platform. On the mobile app, however, it appeared correctly as “Guddis badii,” the proper translation for “rude.”

The error was not just a technical glitch. In Ethiopia, the term Nafxanyaa carries heavy political and historical weight, often used as a derogatory label meaning “one who carries weapons.” For many, seeing this as the “translation” of an everyday Amharic word risked reinforcing division and could easily be misinterpreted as hate speech.

Recognizing the seriousness, the trainees drafted a formal complaint to Google. In their report, they explained the mistranslation, its sensitivity in Ethiopia’s context, and why it needed urgent correction.

### Sample report submitted to Google:



“The Amharic word ‘ብላጌ’ is mistranslated into Oromo as ‘Nefxanyaa’ on the web version. The correct Oromo meaning is closer to ‘Guddis badii’ (‘rude’ in English), which appears correctly in the mobile app. The word ‘Nefxanyaa’ carries a politically sensitive meaning (‘carrying weapons’) and may be misused as hate speech. We urge you to correct this error.”

#### WHY IT MATTERS:

For the trainees, this experience was a powerful learning moment. It showed that even trusted digital tools can contain harmful mistakes. It also highlighted the importance of documenting such issues carefully and reporting them through the right channels.

This case demonstrates that fact-checking is not only about chasing rumors online but also about recognizing and correcting subtle errors in widely used platforms that could carry serious social consequences.

## CASE STUDY 5: Sale and Rental of Old Social Media Accounts

As part of the Voice Up! Information for Peace in Ethiopia (VIP) Project participant [Desalew Gashaye](#) investigated a growing but often overlooked problem: the sale and rental of old social media accounts and groups.

On platforms like LinkedIn and Telegram, advertisements openly offer old groups and channels “for sale” or for rent. Many of these groups already have large memberships or carry trusted reputations, making them valuable to buyers who want instant credibility and an audience they did not build themselves.

In interviews, some individuals admitted that they sold or rented out their accounts just to make money, often without realizing the risks. For them, it seemed like easy income. Yet, the practice carries serious consequences:

**Legal risks** – the account owner can still be held responsible for harmful or illegal content spread through their account.

**Reputation risks** – once an account is misused, the original owner’s name and credibility are damaged.

**Security risks** – personal data and contact networks may fall into the hands of malicious actors.

For ordinary users, this issue may feel distant. But the reality is that once an account changes hands, it can be used to spread scams, propaganda, or misinformation under the cover of a trusted identity.

#### WHY IT MATTERS:

This case highlights how financial desperation and lack of awareness push people to compromise digital safety. What seems like a quick profit can end up fueling scams and disinformation, while exposing both individuals and communities to long-term harm. It underlines the urgent need for digital literacy and awareness campaigns to protect people from becoming both victims and enablers of information disorder.

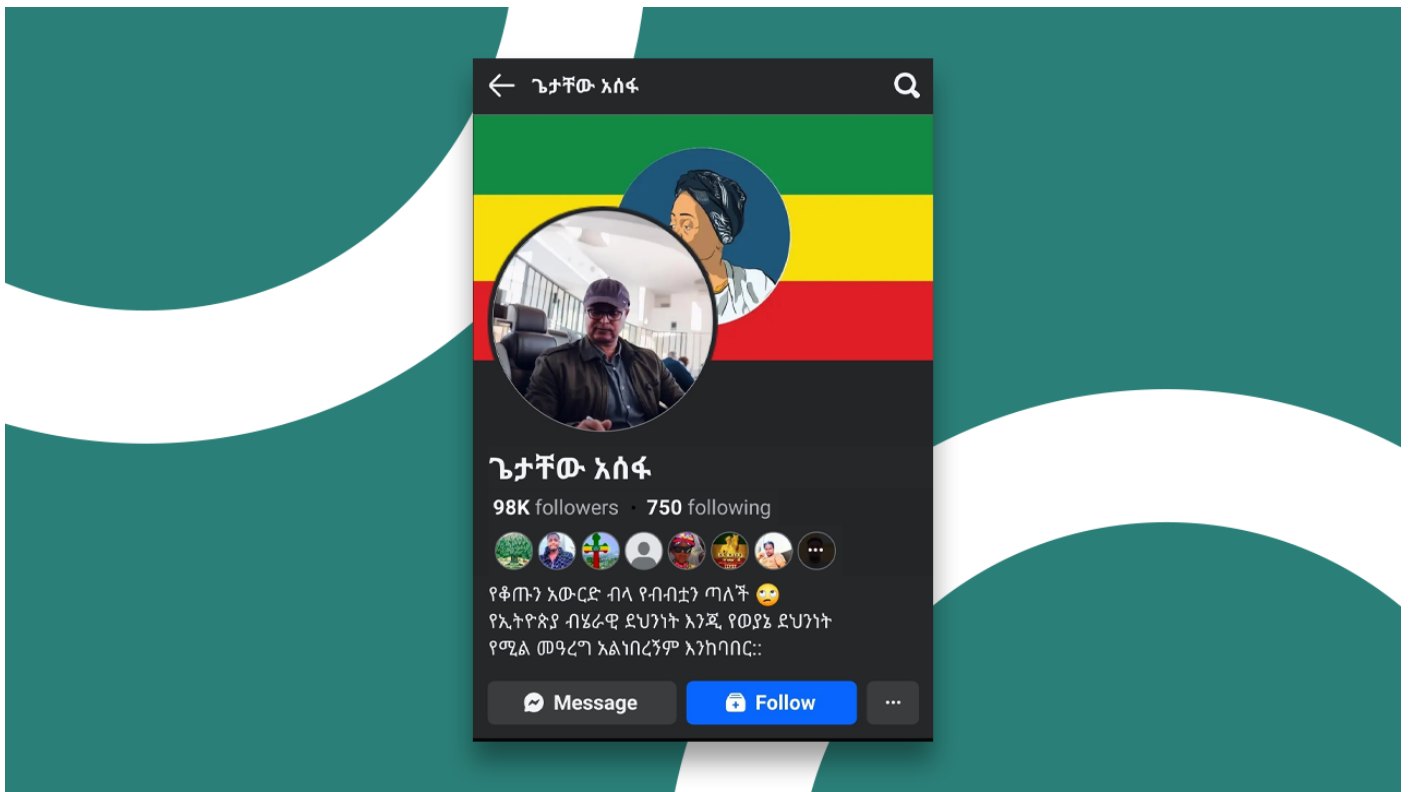
## CASE STUDY 6: Satire and Impersonation as a Vehicle for Disinformation

As part of the Voice Up! Information for Peace in Ethiopia (VIP) Project participant [Kalab Melkamu](#) investigated how satire and impersonation are increasingly used together to spread disinformation.

One striking example was a fake Facebook account created under the name of ቤታቸው አሰፋ, a prominent Ethiopian politician. The account was not authentic, but it consistently mimicked real news stories, twisting them into satirical posts that were later shared as if they were factual.

The deception went further. The page link associated with the account #tayedend-aofficial carried the name of another prominent politician, creating an additional layer of impersonation. Over time, the profile name and details were repeatedly changed, making it harder for ordinary users to recognize the manipulation.

While the posts appeared humorous on the surface, they were widely shared as if they were genuine, blurring the line between parody and reality.



#### WHY IT MATTERS:

This account was not just “joking” it was deliberately designed to manipulate public emotions. By impersonating more than one well-known politician, the creators aimed to provoke (“touch”) certain groups of people, stir outrage, and deepen polarization. The case highlights how satire and impersonation, when combined, can be used purposefully as a weapon of disinformation that is harder to detect and even harder to hold accountable.

## CASE STUDY 7: AI-Generated Content and the Ethiopia– Eritrea Red Sea Debate

When Ethiopia declared that access to the Red Sea was an “existential necessity,” the debate did not stay in the halls of diplomacy. It quickly moved online, where social media users began sharing striking images that seemed to show Ethiopia already making its move.

Some posts featured Ethiopian ships at Red Sea ports or military convoys heading toward Assab. Others depicted Ethiopia controlling maritime trade routes, as if the claim had already become reality. On the other side, pro-Eritrean pages circulated AI-generated visuals of Eritrean forces guarding ports, projecting strength and sovereignty.

None of these images were real. They were generated by artificial intelligence — but to many viewers, they looked authentic. Shared and reshared, they gave the impression that events on the ground were already unfolding, even when nothing of the sort had happened.



### WHY IT MATTERS:

This case shows how AI is changing the way propaganda works. A single image can travel faster and feel more convincing than pages of text. When people believe these visuals, they don't just fuel online arguments they also deepen polarization, create fear, and make political disputes look like military realities. In a tense regional context, that makes AI-generated content a powerful and dangerous weapon of disinformation.

## CASE STUDY 8: Grade 12 National Exam Results and the Spread of False Information

The announcement of Ethiopia's Grade 12 National Exam results is always an emotional time, carrying the weight of students' futures and families' expectations. This year, the Ministry of Education initially announced that results would be released between [September 6-10](#). But when the deadline passed without an update, frustration grew and speculation filled the gap.

On social media, self-proclaimed "sources" began circulating new release dates, each one shared widely as if it were true. For anxious students and parents, the rumors felt believable and spread quickly.

The situation [worsened](#) when [fake websites](#) started appearing, promising early access to results. These sites were not connected to the official exam portal and were designed to exploit desperate families. The Educational Assessment and Examination Services (EAES) later [confirmed](#) that these platforms were fraudulent.

Eventually, the Ministry explained that technical preparations had delayed the release and set a new date.

### WHY IT MATTERS:

This case shows how uncertainty around official events creates fertile ground for misinformation and fraud. Timely communication from institutions is critical, and fact-checkers play an essential role in bridging gaps, ensuring the public relies only on verified sources.

## CASE STUDY 9:

# Scams and Fraudulent Practices in Ethiopia

Scammers in Ethiopia are using digital platforms to exploit people in their daily lives. Banking impersonation calls have become so common that most banks now issue warnings to customers, while phishing attacks on Telegram trick victims into sharing codes or sending “urgent” financial help to contacts.

Pyramid-style investment schemes are also spreading. They often operate under legitimate-looking trade licenses, offering quick returns and assigning flashy titles such as “regional coordinator” to lure participants. Small initial payouts build trust and push people to recruit others. But when the scheme inevitably collapses, local facilitators are left to face the backlash while the real masterminds, often operating from abroad, disappear.

Job scams have become another serious concern. One case documented by Tikhvah Ethiopia involved a young journalist deceived by a fake DSTV casting call. After passing a staged “online exam,” she was told the final selection would take place abroad. She paid over 135,000 birr in supposed facilitation and visa “fees,” only to discover the entire process was fraudulent — leaving her in debt and straining her family relationships.

### WHY IT MATTERS:

These scams reveal how fraudsters weaponize trust and urgency. By posing as banks, employers, or investors, they pressure people into quick decisions that lead to financial loss and lasting personal harm. The lesson is clear: the public must be encouraged to verify all financial and job-related requests through official channels, question offers that seem too good to be true, and treat any demand for codes, fees, or instant action with caution.

# CASE STUDY 10:

## Fake Social Media Ads and TFGBV Risks

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Tikvah Ethiopia uncovered cases where fake social media job ads, especially in modeling and entertainment, were being used as a cover for exploitation and technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV). These ads targeted young women by playing on their ambitions and trust, leaving them vulnerable to harassment, extortion, and deep emotional harm.

Most victims were first contacted online with promises of attractive opportunities. Once convinced, they were invited to private meetings, where they faced pressure to undress for so-called “body checks” or “sample photos.” In some cases, women were even given substances that left them semi-conscious, making them easier to exploit.

Tikvah Ethiopia interviewed several victims, who described their experiences in detail. One young woman explained how she was taken to a pension house in Addis Ababa, where photos were taken without her full awareness. Later, she was ordered to pay 300,000 birr for their deletion. Another participant reported that such schemes are widespread and appear to be run by organized groups across regions.

The photos taken were typically weaponized in two ways:

**Exploitation** – shared or sold online without consent.

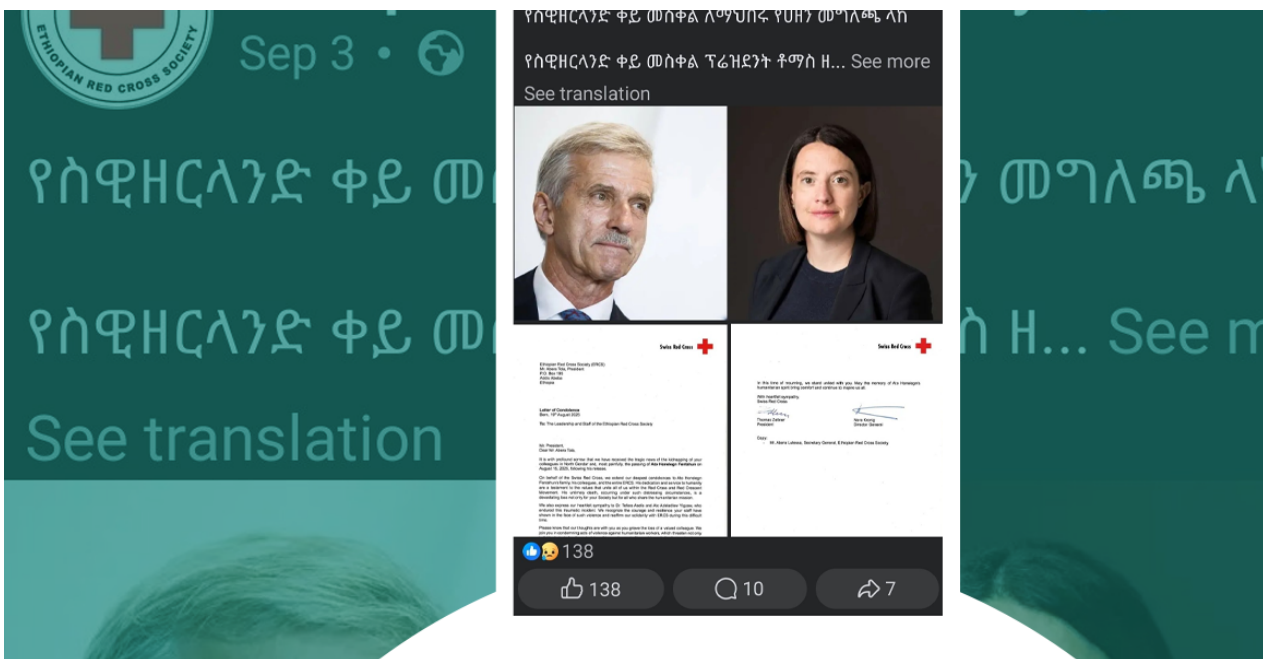
**Extortion** – victims threatened with exposure unless they paid large sums of money.

### WHY IT MATTERS:

This is an untold but widespread problem, often hidden because victims are reluctant to speak out after being harmed. By documenting these cases through direct interviews, Tikvah Ethiopia shed light on a form of gender-based violence that exploits women’s aspirations under the guise of opportunity. The lesson is that public awareness, safe reporting channels, and proactive fact-checking are critical to exposing these practices and protecting vulnerable groups.

# CASE STUDY 11: Conflict-Related Misinformation in Ethiopia

During this period, Ethiopia experienced active conflict in several regions, most notably in the Amhara region, where fighting displaced civilians and disrupted daily life. Humanitarian incidents were reported, including the [Ethiopian Red Cross Society](#) confirming the death of one staff member. On social media, claims also circulated that [14 drivers had been abducted](#) in a single month. Yet despite the seriousness of these events, they received little to no attention in state or mainstream media. In the absence of reliable reporting, the public was left to rely almost entirely on social media for updates.



What circulated online, however, was inconsistent and often exaggerated, with propaganda narratives framing the conflict in ways that served political agendas rather than truth. For journalists and fact-checkers, the environment made verification nearly impossible. Sources feared speaking out even anonymously, worried their phones were being monitored. Local officials hesitated to share details. And those who did pass information to the media or humanitarian groups took enormous risks. In practice, this created a near-total blockage of access to reliable information, leaving civilians trapped between silence and propaganda.

#### WHY IT MATTERS:

For ethical media outlets, the priority in such conflicts is not the balance of power but the safety and dignity of civilians. When information is blocked, their suffering remains invisible, while misinformation and propaganda take over. This case shows how conflict-related misinformation thrives when fear silences sources and makes verification unsafe. The lesson is that protecting safe channels of information is as vital as protecting lives because without them, civilians are left voiceless and vulnerable.

## Patterns and Trends

The 11 case studies reviewed in this briefing reveal a wide spectrum of information disorder in Ethiopia, cutting across politics, economics, technology, and society. While the cases differ in content, several clear patterns emerge:

### 1. Silence Creates Vacuums

When institutions fail to communicate in a timely and clear manner, such as with exam results, salary adjustments, or humanitarian incidents, rumors and misinformation spread rapidly. In these vacuums, unverified claims gain more traction than official statements, which erodes public trust.

### 2. AI as a New Driver of Misinformation

Generative AI is increasingly being used to create manipulated images, videos, and narratives. These tools make false content appear more credible and allow it to spread more quickly, which poses a serious challenge for fact-checkers and the wider public.

### **3. Economic Vulnerability Fuels Fraud**

Scams that target jobs, scholarships, investments, and banking customers thrive because they prey on people's hope for opportunity and financial security. Victims often suffer not only financial loss but also emotional distress and strained family relationships.

### **4. Digital Safety and Security Issues**

Hacked social media accounts, impersonation, and data misuse are becoming widespread threats. These vulnerabilities expose individuals to scams, identity theft, and even gender-based exploitation.

### **5. Reservation to Share Information**

In conflict and politically sensitive contexts, many sources hesitate to share information, even anonymously. Concerns about monitoring and reprisals create a culture of silence, which leaves fact-checkers and media with little access to verification.

### **6. Digital Safety and Security Issues**

The role of trainers, reporters, and fact-checkers under projects such as Voice Up! Information for Peace demonstrates that local actors can challenge falsehoods. However, their work depends on safe access, community trust, and institutional backing, all of which remain fragile in volatile contexts.

## **Overall Trend**

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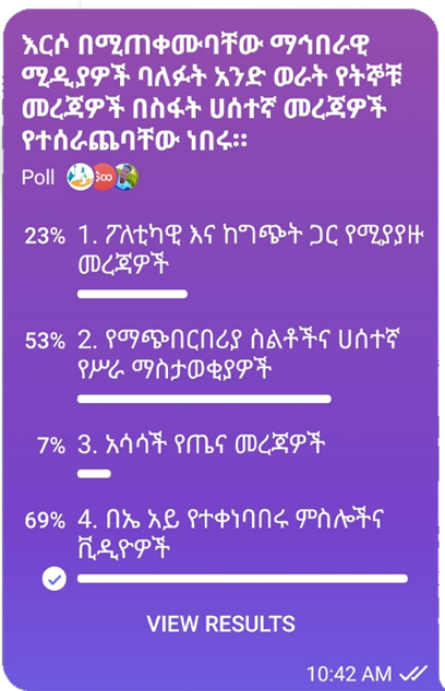
The spread of misinformation in Ethiopia is becoming more diversified, adaptive, and harmful. It touches nearly every part of society, including politics, the economy, education, and gender relations, and it is increasingly shaped by new digital tools such as AI. At the same time, the ability to verify information is shrinking due to institutional silence, digital insecurity, and community hesitation to speak out. This combination creates an environment in which misinformation not only spreads unchecked but also directly harms communities.

# Poll on Misinformation Trends

As part of this monthly briefing under the Voice Up! Information for Peace (VIP) Project, a short poll was conducted to capture perspectives from both VIP trainees (fact-checkers and trainers) and the general audience. The aim was to understand how misinformation circulated during this reporting period and how it was perceived by different groups.

## VIP Participants:

Allowed to select multiple options, since they often observe more than one type of distortion in their verification work.



Students

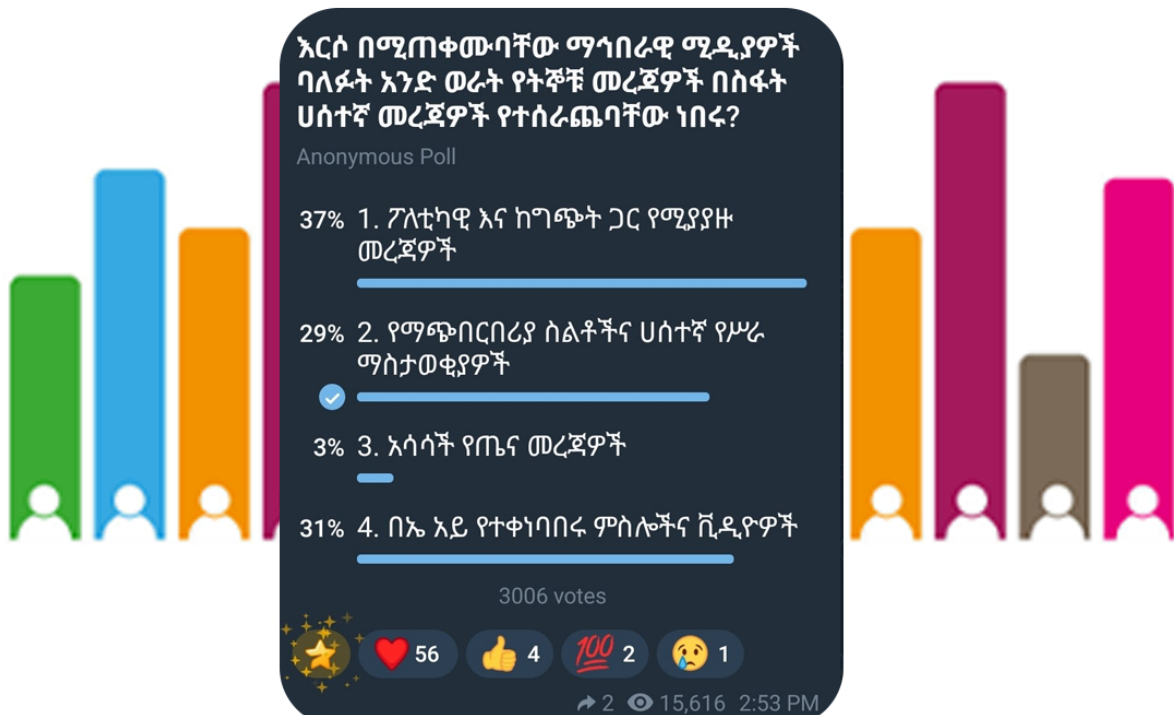


Journalists



## Audience Participants:

Limited to one choice, to identify which type of misinformation had the greatest impact on them personally.



## Question:

“Which types of misinformation did you most frequently encounter on your social media platforms in the past month?”

Options:

1. Political and conflict-related content
2. Scams and fake job advertisements
3. Misleading health information
4. AI-generated images or videos

## Findings

- Among the Voice Up! Information for Peace (VIP) Project student trainees, AI-generated images or videos were the most frequently encountered, followed by scams and fake job advertisements.
- Among the journalist trainees, political and conflict-related content and AI-generated images or videos were the most common, followed by scams and fake job advertisements.
- Among the general audience, political and conflict-related content was observed most often, followed by AI-generated images or videos.

- Across all groups, there was a notable and growing presence of AI-generated content.

## Impression

These findings highlight the increasing dominance of AI-generated content across different groups, signaling a significant shift in the nature of disinformation. While students are more frequently exposed to AI-driven manipulations and deceptive job-related scams, journalists and audiences face heavier exposure to politically and conflict-driven narratives. The pattern underscores both the diversification of disinformation tactics and the urgent need for targeted awareness and training to address AI-driven information disorders.

## Overall Reflections

This briefing shows how misinformation in Ethiopia is becoming more diverse and deeply rooted in everyday life. It is not limited to politics but extends to salaries, education, scams, gender-based risks, and conflict. The trends observed this month reveal how silence, digital insecurity, and restricted access to information create fertile ground for falsehoods to spread. At the same time, the efforts of local fact-checkers under the Voice Up! Information for Peace (VIP) Project demonstrates that resilience is possible.

