

A YEAR OF IMPACT: Protecting Media and Information Integrity

2025

Annual Report

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Message From The Executive Director

Introduction

1	Journalists' Safety, and Digital Security	P. 06
2	Media's Role in Advancing Reform, Good Governance, and Transparency in Fiscal and Public Sector Management	P. 08
3	Media Reform and Governance	P. 11
4	Information Integrity and Elections	P. 13
5	Media and Gender Equality	P. 16
6	Media Viability	P. 18
7	Maharat's Regional and International Presence	P. 20



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Maharat Foundation
Executive Director

A Message From The Executive Director

2025 was a challenging year for Lebanon, for journalists, and for those defending the right to information. In a post-war context marked by institutional weakness and political uncertainty, the media operated under constant pressure while expectations placed on it continued to grow. At Maharat, this reality shaped our choices and sharpened our focus.

I remain deeply convinced that independent and professional media are essential to any democratic process. In Lebanon, journalism is often asked to compensate for failing institutions: to verify what has been manipulated, to uncover what is hidden, and to document information that authorities prefer to keep from public scrutiny.

This work has become more difficult in an information environment increasingly shaped by misinformation, disinformation, and deliberate manipulation, often fueled by populism, hate narratives, and organized interests. In addition, journalists in Lebanon operate in an increasingly dangerous and volatile security environment. Having become direct targets in recent years, their freedom and ability to practice their profession are increasingly constrained.

Beyond Lebanon, journalists across the MENA region face similarly challenging conditions. Key threats include direct targeting in conflict zones, limited access to safety equipment and institutional support, psychological trauma, online censorship, restrictive legal frameworks, and the broader effects of democratic backsliding on international norms.

In response to these challenges, throughout 2025 Maharat focused on journalists' safety and digital security, information integrity, access to information, media literacy, and professional standards. These priorities were grounded in daily realities, not theory.

The year also marked an important step in media reform. By the end of 2025, the draft of the new media law was finalized and referred to the Parliament Bureau. Maharat contributed to this process, advocating for the adoption of the new media law in line with international standards and civil society–endorsed reforms.

These include the decriminalization of publication and expression offenses, transparency of media ownership, an independent National Media Council, and the ending of military court trials for civilians, alongside lifting all remaining legal and practical restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom. We look to 2026 with the hope that this draft will be debated and adopted by the General Assembly.

Moving forward, Maharat will closely monitor the media law reform process and continue to engage in public debate around Lebanon's main reform tracks. We will keep scrutinizing public discourse, media narratives, and policy discussions related to governance, accountability, and the right to information. At the same time, we will continue working with journalists, researchers, educators, and civil society to defend the public's right to credible information and to reinforce the media's role in accountability. This work is demanding, but it remains necessary, especially in Lebanon, and especially now.



Introduction

In the post-war context, and with the gradual return to regular political life, the need has become more urgent to strengthen the right of access to information, entrench evidence-based narratives, and protect independent journalism, core pillars guiding Maharat Foundation's work during this critical phase.

Over the past year, Maharat Foundation implemented more than 15 projects in Lebanon and across the region, addressing key areas including journalists' safety and digital security, media law reform, good governance and fiscal transparency, information integrity and elections, media and gender equality, and media viability.

Despite the diversity of these themes, they were united by a single vision: strengthening a democratic, rights-based information environment grounded in accountability in Lebanon and the region.





1 | Journalists' Safety, and Digital Security

Context:

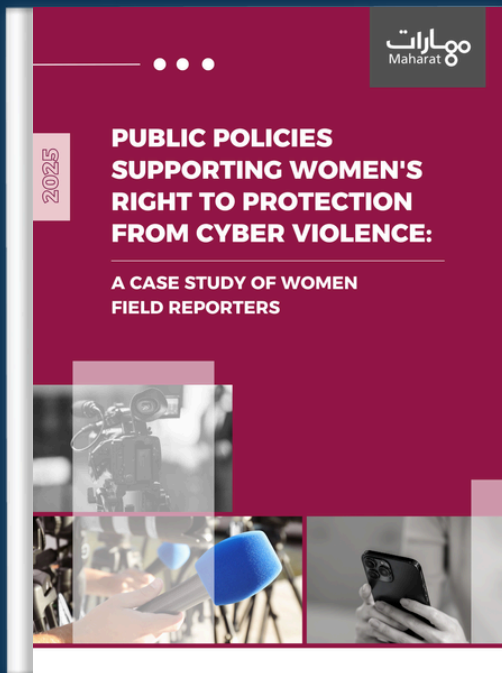
In Lebanon and across the region, journalistic work is increasingly carried out in environments marked by political instability, economic collapse, legal ambiguity, and digital surveillance. Journalists face escalating physical risks, online harassment, cyberattacks, and legal intimidation. The absence of effective protection mechanisms, weak enforcement against perpetrators, and persistent impunity contribute to a climate of fear and self-censorship. In fragile and post-conflict contexts, these risks are compounded by institutional fragility and shrinking media revenues, undermining both professional safety and digital security of journalists.

What Maharat Did:

In order to address the systemic threats facing journalistic work, to safeguarding media freedom, protecting journalists' rights, and ensuring the public's access to reliable and accountable information. Maharat produced specialized reports, including a [digital security manual](#) and an [assessment of the situation of journalists in Lebanon](#).

At the regional level, Maharat published an assessment report examining [threats faced by journalists in the Middle East and North Africa](#) and proposing context-sensitive protection mechanisms. Recognizing that safety extends beyond physical security, Maharat complemented this research with targeted training programs and fellowships that supported [journalists' psychological and professional safety, fact-checking skills](#), and

cross-border knowledge exchange programs on the impact of conflict on the media. These efforts resulted in the production of journalistic work that received recognition and awards in investigative journalism and climate journalism.



It also issued policy papers supporting the protection of women from cyber violence.



In addition, Maharat launched in collaboration with TBWA\RAAD Dubai "Their Final Shot" campaign demanding justice for crimes committed during the war, which won the Silver Award at the 2025 Dubai Lynx Festival.

Maharat also addressed threats targeting alternative media, highlighting how these threats undermine the public's right to access information and accountability, and renewed its focus on impunity through an updated edition of the report titled "In Red Ink".



2 | Media's Role in Advancing Reform, Good Governance, and Transparency in Fiscal and Public Sector Management

Context:

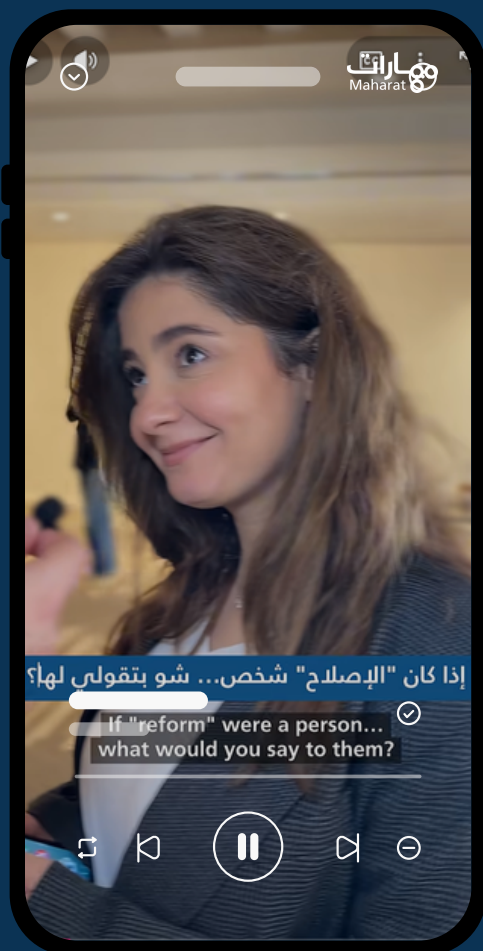
Lebanon's prolonged economic and fiscal crisis has exposed deep structural weaknesses in governance, public financial management, and transparency mechanisms. Despite the centrality of economic reform and public investment oversight to national recovery, media coverage of fiscal policy, reforms and governance processes remains limited, fragmented, or overly technical, often lacking investigative depth and sustained scrutiny. Barriers to accessing information, insufficient data transparency, and limited specialization in economic and other reforms reporting restrict the media's ability to produce in-depth journalistic content, their capacity to inform public debate and hold decision-makers accountable. This gap weakens civic oversight and reduces public understanding of reform trajectories and the management of public funds.

What Maharat Did:

To promote evidence-based economic journalism and public debate on economic and fiscal issues in Lebanon, Maharat Foundation, in collaboration with the Institut des Finances Basil Fuleihan, published a series of reports and carried out training sessions and fellowships for journalists. These initiatives included publications covering reform narratives and media coverage of public investment management, identifying gaps in journalistic performance, and providing recommendations to improve economic reporting, ensure access to information, and monitor public fund usage. Periodic media alerts on fiscal transparency were also issued.

In the same context, Maharat organized an intensive training program on transparency and fiscal reforms, emphasizing the importance of evidence-based journalism in relation to this topic. Specialized fellowships were launched in reform-focused reporting, incorporating components on fact-checking, access to information and inclusive journalism. These fellowships resulted in dozens of reports aimed at empowering journalists to exercise oversight and accountability and strengthen the media's role in governance and transparency in Lebanon.

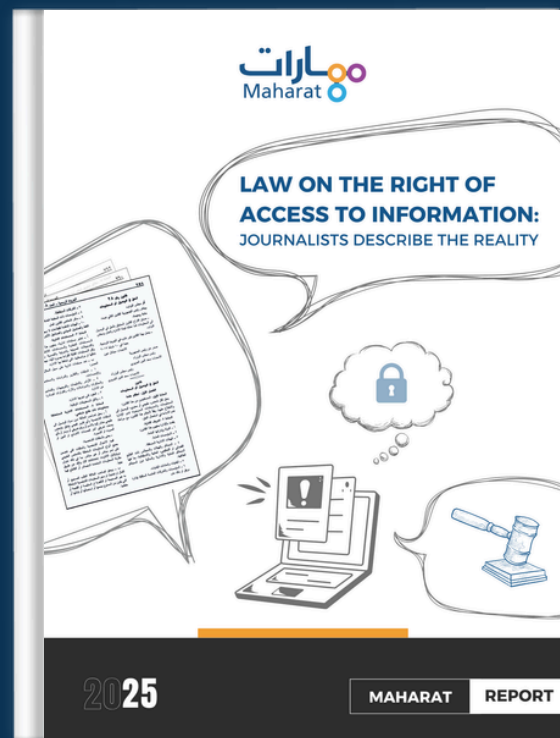
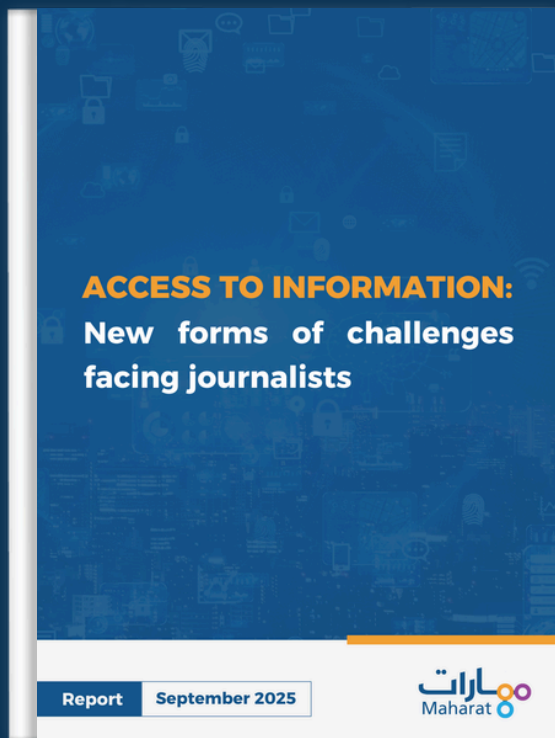
In addition, in collaboration with the United Nations in Lebanon, Maharat organized a workshop on the role of the media in the reform process, emphasizing the media's essential role as a force for accountability and in promoting reform across the country. It was complemented by the launch of a related awareness campaign titled "Information is a Right and Integrity a Responsibility for the Reform Process".



To contribute to advancing reform efforts, Maharat also issued policy papers as part of its work on environmental and media issues in Lebanon, it published a policy paper titled "The Role of Media in Promoting Effective Environmental Governance in Lebanon", highlighting the crucial role media can play in strengthening environmental governance. The paper addresses major challenges and gaps hindering environmental coverage and provides a set of recommendations to enhance accountability and engage the public in Lebanon's environmental discourse.

Recognizing that access to public information is essential for enhancing transparency and empowering journalists to produce in-depth content, Maharat also published two reports documenting the implementation of the right to access information law. The first report highlighted journalists' experiences in seeking information related to fiscal transparency, reforms, governance, and wartime aid, and the obstacles they faced within public administrations.

The second report focused on identifying recurring challenges that hinder journalists' access to official data, emphasizing the need to enforce the law to guarantee access to information and strengthen public accountability.





3 | Media Reform and Governance

Context:

Lebanon's media sector continues to operate under an outdated regulatory framework that does not reflect digital transformation, evolving ownership structures, or contemporary human rights standards. Criminal penalties for expression-related offenses, weak safeguards for editorial independence, and limited transparency in media ownership and financing enable political interference, weaken pluralism, and erode public trust. The absence of an independent regulatory authority and stalled reform efforts further undermine accountability and effective oversight.

Amid economic collapse, political polarization, and the spread of disinformation, these governance gaps in the media sector directly impact journalists' safety, media sustainability, and the public's right to access reliable information, particularly affecting independent and alternative media actors who lack adequate legal protection.

What Maharat Did:

As part of its efforts to strengthen media governance and the information environment in Lebanon, Maharat Foundation published a series of reports addressing [media pluralism](#), [media transparency](#), and [information integrity](#). These included studies focusing on the impact of political influence on pluralism, the risks posed by the lack of transparency in media ownership and financing, and the need to align legal frameworks with human rights standards to counter disinformation. The reports also put forward recommendations to enhance independence and foster a more diverse and trustworthy media landscape.



In this context, Maharat launched “[Turning Point for Media Reform in Lebanon](#)”, a campaign supporting the adoption of the new media law, which decriminalizes expression-related cases, enhances transparency in media ownership, and establishes an independent media council. This campaign was part of the project “Media Reform to Enhance Freedom of Expression in Lebanon” supported by the European Union.





4 | Information Integrity and Elections

Context:

Lebanon is no exception to the global trend whereby social media platforms amplify falsehoods and expose users to disinformation and inflammatory content, fueling societal divisions, fragmentation, polarization, and populism. Monitoring during the last legislative elections which took place in 2022 revealed the widespread dissemination of false information, hate speech, emotionally charged propaganda, and covert political advertising, all of which threaten electoral fairness, democratic accountability, and overall information integrity. Furthermore, past experiences, particularly during the 2022 elections, revealed legal and institutional gaps, as well as insufficient resources allocated to the Supervisory Commission for Elections, that resulted in ineffective media regulation during electoral periods.

Looking ahead to the 2026 elections, despite recent political shifts in Lebanon, a significant rise in the use of AI-generated bots, synthetic content, and deepfakes is anticipated. This underscores the urgent need for effective regulation to safeguard the transparency and integrity of the electoral process.

What Maharat Did:

In response to the pre-existent gaps related to the preparedness of the media ecosystem to the Lebanese municipal election, Maharat launched the campaign [#Municipalities2025](#), aimed at strengthening journalism's role in monitoring elections, countering misinformation, and exposing gender-based violence against women in politics.

With the May 2026 parliamentary elections approaching, Maharat Foundation intensified its efforts to promote the integrity of the electoral process and foster a transparent and responsible information environment ahead through reports, studies, training programs and campaigns.

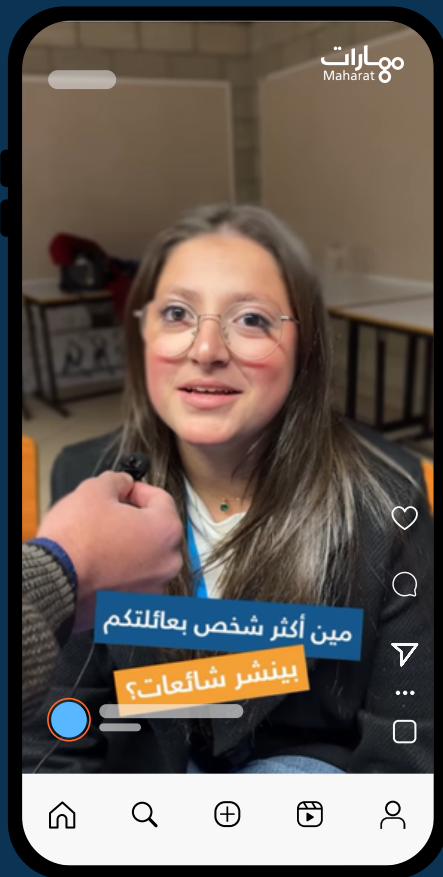
In this context, Maharat published the report Oversight, Media, and Accountability: Challenges and Opportunities Ahead of the 2026 Elections, drawing on lessons learned from the 2022 elections, and highlighting the need for an independent, empowered Supervisory Commission for Elections, a new media law, and active civil society engagement in monitoring and awareness efforts, in order to guarantee independent and effective oversight of electoral media and advertising.

It also issued a report titled Safeguarding Electoral Integrity in the Social Media Era, which examined the impact of digital platforms on Lebanon's electoral information environment and highlighted regulatory gaps. The report emphasizes that effective responses require a combination of legislative and non-legislative measures. Although reform is urgently needed, it must strike a careful balance, as overregulation could further curtail civic space and restrict freedom of expression.

In addition, Maharat contributed to the publication of the study Regulation of Social Media and Elections in Europe, in cooperation with the Media and Journalism Research Center (MJRC), with the aim of drawing on European experiences in countering disinformation, ensuring transparency in political advertising and safeguarding democratic integrity. These reports are part of the project "Media Reform to Enhance Freedom of Expression in Lebanon" supported by the European Union.



Alongside those publications, Maharat implemented training programs targeting journalists, women, and youth. These covered media and municipal elections, effective communication for women candidates, and media and information literacy for students, in support of information integrity, the protection of voters' rights, and the strengthening of democratic accountability.



Furthermore, in partnership with Madanyat, Maharat delivered two training workshops on misinformation and digital violence, targeting women candidates, political activists, and youth working in electoral campaigns. These activities aimed to enhance the participation of women and youth and contribute to a safer and more respectful electoral environment.



5 | Media and Gender Equality

Context:

Inequality in the media landscape persists despite Lebanon's international commitments to gender equality and women's participation in public life. Media representation and newsroom practices continue to reflect structural imbalances. Women remain underrepresented in political and conflict-related coverage, frequently portrayed through stereotypical narratives, or excluded from decision-making and expert spaces, due to the absence of institutionalized gender-sensitive editorial policies and limited awareness of international frameworks on women, peace, and security.

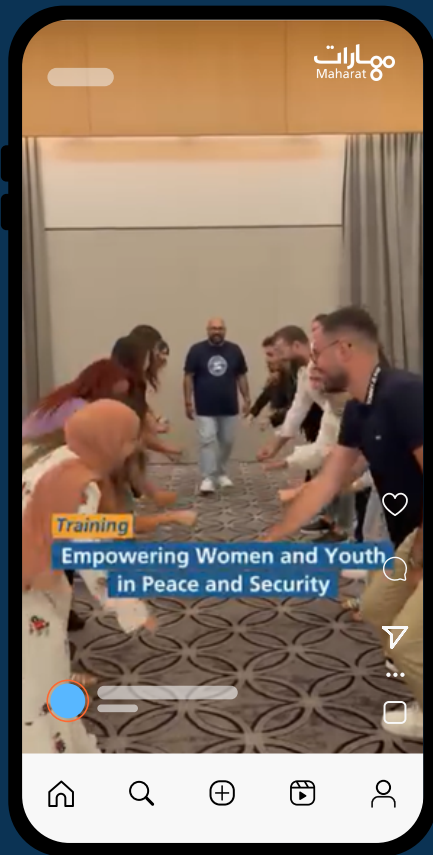
In times of crisis and armed conflict, gender perspectives are often marginalized, while emerging technologies - including artificial intelligence - risk reproducing existing biases in content production.

What Maharat Did:

In partnership with Télé Liban, the British Embassy, and UN Women, Maharat organized trainings for journalists to strengthen equality-focused media coverage and raise awareness of international commitments, alongside technical support for producing content that applies the principles acquired.

Maharat Foundation delivered training programs and media initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality. These included an interactive workshop for journalism students on the role

of women and youth in peace and security, as well as programs supporting the production of gender-sensitive media content in war coverage.



Maharat also introduced a learning course to promote the adoption of gender-sensitive practices, including in conflict reporting and the use of modern technologies such as artificial intelligence, with a focus on challenging stereotypes and amplifying women's voices.





6 | Media Viability

Context:

Alternative media in the MENA region face unique challenges, such as restrictive legal frameworks, media capture, economic challenges, and political pressures. These challenges are further compounded by global threats to media viability, including the growing concentration of advertising revenue and the influence of social media algorithms, as the digital transformation of the media industry disrupts traditional business models.

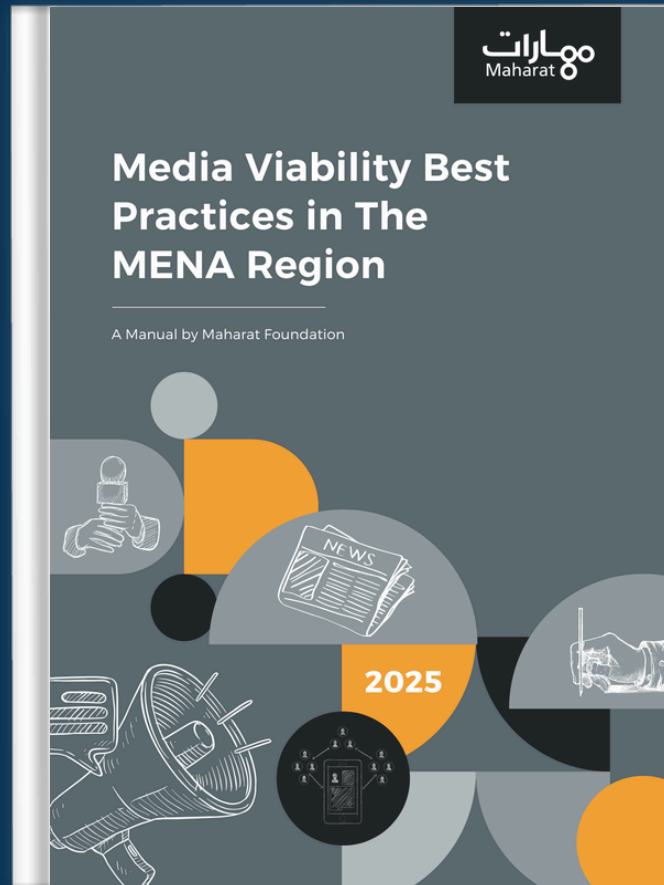
In addition to these structural shifts, media organizations have faced sudden shocks in recent years, including conflicts, pandemics and economic downturns. These factors, combined with unregulated digital platforms, declining public trust, and audience reluctance to pay for content, further threaten media viability by undermining sustainable business models, editorial independence, and the stability of media environments worldwide.

What Maharat Did:

Within this landscape, Maharat has positioned itself as a regional actor contributing practical, research-based responses to these challenges.

In order to address them, Maharat developed and published a regional [manual on best practices for media viability in the Middle East and North Africa](#).

The manual discusses how alternative media platforms can leverage innovative business models, diversify revenue streams, implement clear editorial policies, and foster audience engagement to build resilience in an increasingly challenging environment. Additionally, it explores the crucial role that partnerships play in strengthening media viability while ensuring content credibility and trust.





7 | Maharat's Regional and International Presence

Context:

Lebanon's media and governance challenges intersect with regional and global debates on information integrity, media freedom, and democratic reform. Ensuring that Lebanese civil society perspectives are present in these discussions is essential to linking national reform efforts with international standards and comparative experiences.

Strengthened engagement between Lebanese actors and regional and international networks supports knowledge exchange, policy dialogue, and coordinated responses to shared challenges such as disinformation, energy transition governance, and journalist protection.

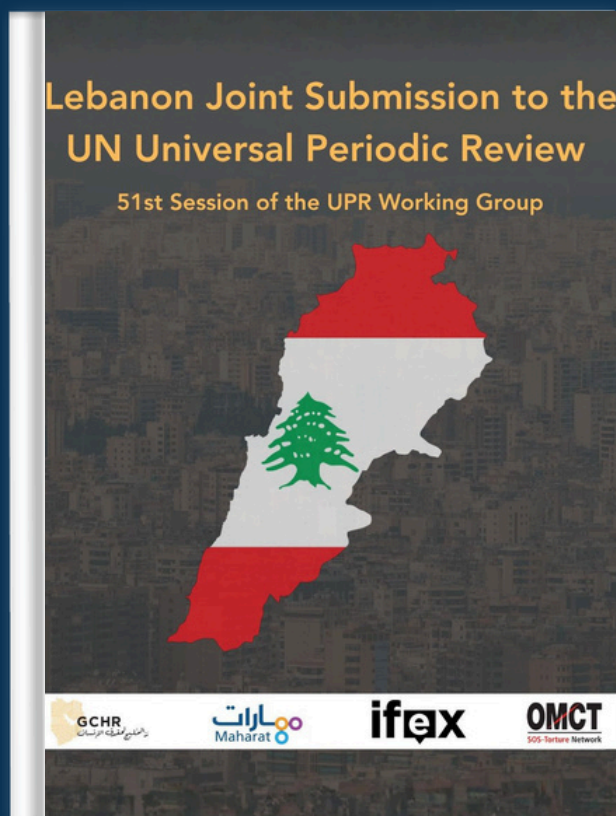
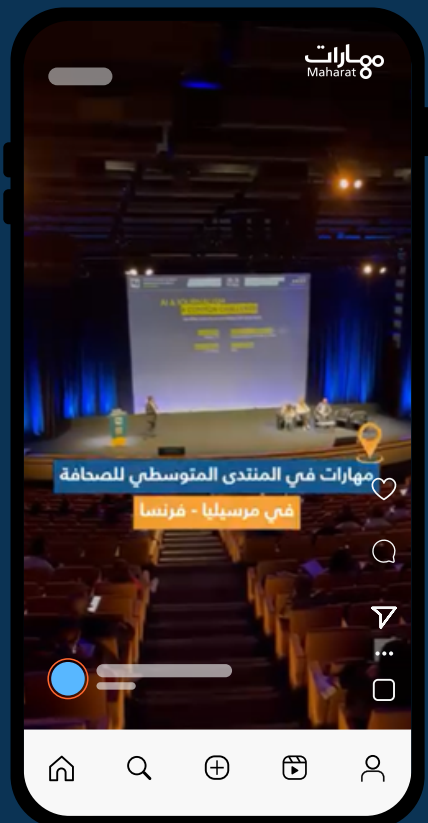
Through participation in high-level forums, Maharat contributes to these exchanges and promotes the inclusion of Lebanon's reform priorities within broader international conversations.

What Maharat Did:

In 2025, Maharat participated in multiple regional and international forums, including the High-Level International Conference on Information Integrity and Independent Media, as part of the eighth edition of the Paris Peace Forum at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris.



Maharat also, participated in the Mediterranean Assises of Journalism in Marseille, with the session "Commit to Solution-Oriented Journalism", and a side event in Geneva prior to Lebanon's fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR), presenting joint recommendations for the country.



Maharat represented Lebanon at the Just Energy Transition in MENA conference in Tunisia to discuss the media's role in the transition to clean energy and monitoring policy implementation.

It also took part in the ARIJ Annual Forum 2025 in Amman - Jordan, to promote investigative journalism's role in accountability and governance, through several panel discussions and workshops addressing:



Legal challenges related to media and Freedom Of Expression

Journalism in the age of AI

Editorial independence and support

Media sustainability in times of crisis

List of International Partners:



Funded by the European Union
بتمويل من الاتحاد الأوروبي



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