

LONDA 2025

DIGITAL RIGHTS & INCLUSION IN AFRICA REPORT

The Gambia

Country Report



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The Gambia

By Muhammed B. Sowe

Executive Summary

This report gathered evidence from diverse sources including newspaper articles, court decisions, press statements and reports from media rights organisations. It covers thematic areas such as internet access and disruptions; online freedom of expression and access to information; data protection and cybersecurity; privacy and surveillance; developments in ICT and emerging technologies; digital inclusion. The country's score for TheScore Index puts it

at 34 out of 60, moderately compliant for 2025. Key highlights include enactment of the Personal Data Protection and Privacy Act 2025 which makes provision for the protection of digital rights. Although the Personal Data Protection and Privacy Act 2025 was enacted during the reporting period, its institutional and enforcement mechanisms remain at an early stage of implementation. The validation of the Access to Information Regulations 2025, which seeks to give

effect to the full implementation of the Access to Information Act 2021, is another key highlight. While the Act is formally operational, it has not yet been fully implemented in practice. The report shows that The Gambia continues to experience slow internet connectivity, coupled with unaffordable internet

services. Also, The Gambia still maintains laws on sedition and false news. These implementation gaps, particularly in access to information, freedom of expression, and affordable connectivity continue to limit The Gambia's full compliance with the ACHPR Declaration.



Introduction

The 2024 Londa Report highlighted that The Gambia made considerable progress in the areas of digital rights and internet freedom since 2017, coupled with persistent challenges.¹ While there has been an increase in the number of internet users and the enactment of the data protection law to protect digital rights, The Gambia continues to experience slow and poor internet connection, internet disruptions and high cost of internet data due to poor ICT infrastructure. Limited public investment in ICT infrastructure continues to constrain meaningful access. The Gambia also maintains laws that threaten digital rights and internet freedom. These laws are contained in the newly enacted Criminal Offences Act 2025, which maintains the criminalisation of sedition and false news, despite the decision of the ECOWAS Court of Justice decision in the case of Federation of African Journalist & 4 Ords v The Gambia ECW/CCJ/JUD/04/18 delivered in 2018. The Access to Information Act 2021

is not fully implemented, thus there is absence of proactive disclosure of information by public institutions. These unresolved challenges directly informed The Gambia's 'moderately compliant' score under TheScore Index. This is as a result of the existence of the unresolved challenges referred to above, which continued into 2025.

Internet Access

The Gambia's telecommunications services regulatory body, Gambia Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) has no complete data on internet coverage, quality and disruptions for the year 2025. The lack of complete internet data by PURA reveals a troubling account of poor infrastructure leading to weak enforcement. The fact that PURA as the internet service regulatory authority does not have readily available data on the state of internet

1. Paradigm Initiative, Muhammed B. Sowe 'Londa 2024 Digital Rights and Inclusion in Africa Report-The Gambia' (2024) <https://paradigmhq.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/The-Gambia-Country-Report.pdf> (accessed 5 November 2025).

accessibility, quality and disruptions in The Gambia clearly shows absence of the required infrastructure to enable effective and efficient regulation of the telecommunication sector. This regulatory data gap underscores structural weaknesses in sector oversight and limits PURA's ability to ensure universal affordable, and reliable internet access.

DataReportal's 'Digital 2025' report shows that The Gambia's internet penetration rate stood at 45.9% of the population (1.28 million people) at the start of 2025.² This is a decrease of 8.3% from January 2024 to January 2025. The report also shows that there are 3.15 million cellular mobile internet connections by the start of January 2025 representing an equivalent of 113% of the total population, with an increase of 5.5% compared to 2024. The report noted that many people make use of more than one mobile connection, and as such the mobile connection

users significantly exceeded the total population. Also, the number of social media users in The Gambia at the start of 2025 stood at 449,000 active users, equating to 16.1% of the total population.³ This reflects an increase of 45,000 users from the year 2024. Despite the increase in internet users in 2025, the fastest internet connection speed in The Gambia recorded in the third quarter of 2025 was provided by Netpage with an average download speed of 17.2 Mb/s.⁴

The Gambia is among the 10 countries with the slowest broadband connection and network qualities for citizens. This is associated with the country's lack of investment in ICT infrastructure and technology which ensures faster internet speed. For example, the budget of the Government of The Gambia for 2025 shows that the Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy (MoCDE) was allocated the sum of GMD96,212,260

2. DataReportal 'Digital 2025: The Gambia' (2025) <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-gambia> (accessed 9 November 2025).
3. DataReportal 'Digital 2025: The Gambia' (2025) <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-gambia> (accessed 9 November 2025).
4. Speedgeo 'Internet Speed in Gambia' (2025) <https://www.speedgeo.net/statistics/gambia> (2025) (Accessed 9 November 2025).

(US\$1,355,102.25),⁵ representing 0.25% of the national budget.⁶ This is evidence of the lack of prioritisation of ICT development in order to enhance access and inclusion of all people, including children and vulnerable groups. The absence of targeted budget lines for rural communities, women, or persons with disabilities further undermines equitable digital inclusion. This shows the lack of commitment of the Government of The Gambia to develop the ICT sector with a view to ensuring accessibility and affordability to the people, including vulnerable groups. The allocation of less than 1% of the total national budget to the ICT sector explains the reason for the poor telecommunication infrastructure in The Gambia. This has a great impact on the country's socio-economic advancement, thus limiting the participation of Gambians in the global digital economy.

The Gambia suffers from unstable and slow internet connection coupled with exorbitantly high cost of mobile data, making the Internet unaffordable for many Gambians.⁷ On August 22 2025, a coalition of civil society organisations including the Edward Francis Small Centre for Rights and Justice (EFSCRJ), Gambians Against Looted Assets (GALA), and Team Gom Sa Bopa organised a peaceful protest against the decision of PURA to enforce a minimum data tariff of D50 (US\$0.69) per 1GB for GSM operators. The coalition condemned PURA's new policy as "anti-competitive" and a direct assault on affordable internet access, a critical lifeline for education, employment, and civic engagement in Gambia. The D50 per gigabyte minimum tariff marks a staggering 243% increase from promotional data bundles previously offered by GSM operators at rates as low as D13.33 (equivalent

5. Carbri 'Approved Estimates of Revenue and Expenditures 2025'. (2025) Available at: <https://www.cabri-sbo.org/en/documents/estimates-of-revenue-and-expenditure-5> (Accessed 12 November 2025).
6. Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs 'Citizens' Budget: Budget of the Government of The Gambia 2025' (2025). Available at: <https://mofea.gov.gm/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/2025-Approved-Budget-Citizens-Version.pdf> (Accessed 12 November 2025). The National Budget for 2025 also shows that the sum of D12,320, 000 (USD173, 521) has been allocated for Information Communication Technology (ICT) research and development.
7. The Point Newspaper 'GCCl, consumers slam PURA's halt on cheap internet bundles' (2025) https://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/headlines/gcci-consumers-slam-puras-halt-on-cheap-internet-bundles#google_vignette (Accessed 19 November 2025).

to US\$0.18) per gigabyte.⁸ Following a peaceful protest, the police arrested 19 protesters and charged them with unlawful assembly,⁹ a move that caused outrage and condemnation by civil society organisations including Article 19.¹⁰ The arrest of protesters advocating for affordable internet access raises concerns under Principle 37 of the ACHPR Declaration, which obliges states to promote universal, affordable, and meaningful access to the internet. Reports continue to show that The Gambia has one of the most expensive internet charges in the world and ranked 8th in the African countries with the most expensive mobile data.¹¹ Internet connectivity in rural Gambia is poorer than in the urban areas because of the absence of adequate communication infrastructure. The public outrage and peaceful protests by civil society

organisations are evidence of people's frustration with the high cost of the internet coupled with slow internet services across the country. The GSM operators are accused of exploiting users with high tariffs and poor services, while PURA is accused of failing to ensure affordable and reliable internet service.

Although the Government started engaging Starlink Services for the provision of satellite internet services to diversify internet access options in the country,¹² in 2024, there were no new developments regarding the operations of Starlink services in The Gambia in 2025. Starlink has submitted an application for a license to operate internet services in The Gambia and it is awaiting the approval of the Minister for

8. The Alkamba Times '19 Protesters arrested in clash with the police over PURA's data price hike' (2025). <https://alkambatimes.com/19-protesters-arrested-in-clash-with-police-over-puras-data-price-hike/> (accessed 9 November 2025).
9. The Alkamba Times '19 Protesters arrested in clash with the police over PURA's data price hike' (2025). <https://alkambatimes.com/19-protesters-arrested-in-clash-with-police-over-puras-data-price-hike/> (accessed 9 November 2025).
10. Article 19 'The Gambia: Authorities must release protesters and protect their rights' (2025) <https://www.article19.org/resources/the-gambia-authorities-must-release-protesters-and-protect-their-rights/> (accessed 9 November 2025).
11. Gambiana 'GDC calls for affordable and reliable internet in The Gambia' (2025) <https://gambiana.com/gdc-calls-for-affordable-and-reliable-internet-in-the-gambia/> (accessed 9 November 2025);
12. Foroyaa Newspaper 'Gambia Explores Possible Launch of Starlink Services' (2024) <https://foroyaa.net/gambia-explores-possible-launch-of-starlink-services/> (accessed 9 November 2025).

Communication and Digital Economy.¹³ As of November 26 2025, Starlink services are not available. Starlink's internet service is expected to bridge the digital divide; offer high-speed internet access; enhance rural internet access; end monopolies enjoyed by local ISPs and ensure competition. Notwithstanding, concerns remain about the potential implications, including national security and localization of data.

Internet disruption

In May 2025, The Gambia's national telecommunications provider, Gamtel, reported internet disruption to its fibre optic networks due to fibre cable cuts through vandalism.¹⁴ The internet disruption, which lasted for about four hours, caused internet black out in Banjul, Kanifing and the West Coast Region. It affected both residential and commercial entities in these regions. Gamtel's fibre cable cut remains a

major source of internet disruptions in The Gambia. Despite these challenges, there appears to be no deliberate internet shutdowns occasioned by the State during the reporting period, a sign of compliance with international standards.

Online Freedom of

Expression and Access

to Information

Section 25(1) of the Constitution of The Gambia, 1997, guarantees the right to freedom of speech and expression, which includes freedom of the media. Even though The Gambia has registered significant progress in freedom of expression and of the media between 2017 and 2024,¹⁵ the events in 2025 suggest a retrogression. The Gambia enacted the Criminal Offences Act 2025 which criminalises false publication and broadcasting, sedition,

13. African Press 'gov't Taking Due Diligence Amid US Pressure for Starlink' (2025) <https://www.africa-press.net/gambia/all-news/govt-taking-due-diligence-amid-u-s-pressure-for-starlink> (Accessed 9 November 2025)

14. Gambiana 'Gamtel investigates sabotage after major internet disruption' (2025) <https://gambiana.com/gamtel-investigates-sabotage-after-major-internet-disruption/> (Accessed 9 November 2025)

15. Reporters Without Borders 'Gambia' (2025) <https://rsf.org/en/country/gambia> (Accessed 9 November 2025)

and parental insult of public officials. This is notwithstanding the decision of the Community Court of Justice of ECOWAS in 2018 that The Gambia's criminalisation of sedition and false publication and broadcasting is not in line with international human rights.¹⁶ Civil Society organisations condemned the National Assembly for passing the Criminal Offences Act 2025 with repressive provisions against freedom of expression and of the press.¹⁷ They called on the National Assembly to repeal the said provisions. Members of the public also raised concerns about

the provisions being discriminatory,¹⁸ legally absurd¹⁹ and that they pose a threat to Gambia's democracy.²⁰ The sedition law was applied within months of its enactment. On August 21 2025, sedition charges were brought against Abdoulie Sanyang over comments made on West Coast Radio where he accused President Adama Barrow of electoral malpractices in the 2021 Presidential elections.²¹

The Gambia introduced the Cyber Crime Bill in the National Assembly, which contains provisions that impede freedom of speech and expression,

16. Federation of African Journalist & 4 Ords v The Gambia ECW/CCJ/JUD/04/18 http://www.courtecowas.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/ECW_CCJ_JUD_04_18.pdf (accessed 10 November 2024).

17. Kerr Fatou 'EFSCRJ Raises Issues and Concerns about the Criminal Offences Act 2025' (2025) <https://www.kerrfatou.com/efscrj-raises-issues-and-concerns-about-the-criminal-offences-act-2025/> (Accessed 9 November 2025); The Media Foundation for West Africa 'Gambia Press Union challenges government over laws limiting press freedom' (2025) <https://mfwa.org/partner-highlights/gambia-gpu-press-freedom-laws-2025-2/> (Accessed 9 November 2025); The Point Newspaper 'RSF asks Gambia to repeal draconian media laws' (2025) <https://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/headlines/rsf-asks-gambia-to-repeal-draconian-media-laws> (Accessed 9 November 2025).

18. Askanwi Gambia Radio and Newspaper 'Gambia: The New Criminal Offence Act 2025 is discriminatory' (2025) <https://askanigambia.com/gambia-the-new-crmininal-offence-act-2025-is-discriminatory/> (Accessed 9 November 2025).

19. The Point Newspaper 'Section 113 of the Criminal Offences Act 2025 is legally absurd and must be repealed' (2025) <https://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/opinion/section-113-of-the-criminal-offences-act-2025-is-legally-absurd-and-must-be-repealed> (Accessed 9 November 2025).

20. The Voice Newspaper 'Critics Slam Gambia's New Criminal Code as Threat to Democracy' (2025) <https://www.voicegambia.com/2025/06/12/critics-slam-gambias-new-criminal-code-as-threat-to-democracy/> (Accessed 9 November 2025).

21. The Alkamba Times 'Former Soldier Remanded in Arson and Sedition Charges, Case moved to High Court' (2025) <https://alkambatimes.com/former-soldier-remanded-on-arson-and-sedition-charges-case-moved-to-high-court/> (Accessed 9 November 2025).

including digital rights. Furthermore, 2025 witnessed the return of intimidation of journalists by Government officials, including the Minister of Information. These events evidence erosion of freedom of speech and expression as well as freedom of the media. On March 27 2025, the Minister of Information, Dr Ismaila Ceesay, summoned the Editor in Chief of The Voice Newspaper; the Media Council; and the Newspaper Publishers Association. The summon was in connection to a report in The

Voice Newspaper, titled “Survey reveals corruption at the Presidency, National Assembly,” which looked at corruption in the public sector. The Minister of Information claimed that the headline was misleading and damaged the image of the Government of The Gambia. This move by the Minister of Information was condemned by human rights organisations.²² and showcased intimidation of the media over their reports.

All these actions continue to affect The Gambia’s ranking on the freedom of press index, with a decline from 10th to 11th position out of 54 African countries.²³ The Gambia maintained 58th position out of 180 countries in the global press freedom index, the same position as 2024.²⁴ The Gambia’s drop in ranking for the year 2025 is linked to Government exerting pressure



Survey reveals corruption at the Presidency, National Assembly,

Key Informant A

22. The Media Foundation for West Africa ‘The Gambia: Minister summons newspaper editor, media stakeholders over newspaper headline’ (2025) <https://mfwa.org/country-highlights/gambia-minister-summons-editor-over-newspaper-headline/> (Accessed 9 November 2025); Askani Gambia ‘Gambia: Forcing the Media to Apologize is intimidation’ (2025) <https://askanigambia.com/gambia-forcing-the-media-to-apologize-is-intimidation/> (Accessed 9 November 2025)
23. Askanwi ‘Sierra Leone and Liberia Overtake The Gambia in African Press Freedom Index’ (2025) <https://www.askanwi.com/news/sierra-leone-and-liberia-overtake-the-gambia-in-african-press-freedom-index#:~:text=Folder:%20About%20Us-,Sierra%20Leone%20and%20Liberia%20Overtake%20The%20Gambia%20in%20African%20Press,%E2%80%9Csatisfactory%E2%80%9D%20press%20freedom%20environment> (Accessed 9 November 2025)

on media outlets at times; hostility towards journalists, particularly from comments by the President accusing the media of reporting false news and having the intent of promoting conflict and instability; enactment of repressive laws against freedom of expression and of the press, including laws on parental insult of certain government officials and false publication and broadcasting.²⁵

With regards to content moderation, there have been no reports of blocking or filtering of websites or apps by the Government from 2017 to 2025. However, concerns have been raised about the Cybercrime Bill 2024, currently before the National Assembly, containing provisions which have the potential future restrictions of websites, thus impacting digital rights.²⁶

Access to Information

Since the enactment of the Access to Information Act, 2021 (ATI 2021), it is yet to be fully implemented.²⁷ The lack of implementation of the ATI 2021 extends to the period under review. The following key elements of the ATI are yet to be fully implemented:

(a) While the ATI 2021 requires the head of every public body, in consultation with the Minister of Information, to designate a suitable officer as information officer to receive requests for information, this has not been complied with.²⁸ On November 12 2025, the Access to Information Commission issued a press release urging Ministries, Departments and Agencies to designate information officers in compliance with the ATI

24. Reporters Without Borders 'Gambia' (2025) <https://rsf.org/en/country/gambia> (Accessed 9 November 2025)

25. Ibid.

26. Civicus 'New Criminal Law and Draft Cybercrime Bill in The Gambia threatens Press Freedom, Freedom of Expression and Digital Rights' (2025) [https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/new-criminal-law-and-draft-cyber-crime-bill-in-the-gambia-threatens-press-freedom-freedom-of-expression-and-digital-rights/#:~:text=On%2024th%20March%202025%2C%20The,the%20draft%20bill\)%20for%20adoption.](https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/new-criminal-law-and-draft-cyber-crime-bill-in-the-gambia-threatens-press-freedom-freedom-of-expression-and-digital-rights/#:~:text=On%2024th%20March%202025%2C%20The,the%20draft%20bill)%20for%20adoption.) (Accessed 9 November 2025)

27. Reporters Without Borders 'Gambia' (2025) <https://rsf.org/en/country/gambia> (Accessed 9 November 2025).

28. The Point Newspaper 'Public institutions urged to designate information officers' (2025) <https://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/headlines/public-institutions-urged-to-designate-information-officers> (Accessed 31st December 2025).

2021.²⁹ The implication of the absence of an information officer is that the people do not know whom to contact to request information. This denies them the right to request and access information from public bodies.

(b) Section 12 of the ATI 2021 provides that a request for information shall be accompanied by such a reproduction fee as prescribed in a regulation made by the Minister of Information. No such regulation has been made by the Minister so as to prescribe the reproduction fees. The absence of a regulation on reproduction fee allows for potential and unpredictable excessive cost of reproduction, which may render information inaccessible to the public.

(c) Public bodies do not respond to requests for information within the prescribed time frame of 21 days for response. For example, the author of this report on October 27 2025 made a request via email for information to the PURA and MoCDE as regards data on state of internet access in The Gambia in 2025; the number of reported internet disruptions from January 2025 to October 2025; the state of implementation of the

Universal Service Fund in The Gambia in 2025; and the state of digital inclusion of persons with disabilities in 2025. Even though PURA acknowledged receipt of the request, it only responded to the request for information on 31 December 2025. This is 64 days after the request. MoCDE is the ministry responsible for communications, and is supposed to have this information, neither acknowledged nor responded to the request.

(d) Section 61 of the ATI 2021 requires public bodies and relevant private bodies to submit implementation plans to the Access to Information Commission within 6 months of the establishment of the Commission. The implementation plan should outline the institution's operational plan to implement its obligations under the ATI 2021 and information publication plan in respect of its proactive disclosure responsibilities under the Act. The Access to Information Commission was established on 5 September 2024, when the five Commissioners were sworn into office by the Vice President. It has been over a year since the establishment of the Access to Information Commission and none of the public bodies and relevant private bodies has submitted their

29. Ibid.

implementation plan to the Access to Information Commission.

(e) The Access to Information Commission takes a considerable amount of time to determine appeals arising from refusals or denials to grant access to information by public bodies. For example, The Republic, an investigative media outlet, has submitted six appeals with the Access to Information Commission against government institutions since February 2025. As at November 26 2025, the Access to Information Commission has not determined these appeals. It claimed that it could not determine the said appeals in the absence of regulations, which it is already developing. This is in the light of the fact that the Act is silent on the timelines for the determination of appeals by the Access to Information Commission. The proposed regulations will hopefully address the time limit. The absence of implementing regulations continues to stall the effective enforcement of the ATI 2021 as appeals against decisions of heads of public

bodies cannot be determined.

Notwithstanding the above, the Gambia has taken some commendable steps in 2025 in the implementation of the ATI law of 2021. The Access to Information Commission has been fully established after the swearing of the Commissioners in September 2024.³⁰ On January 27 2025, the stakeholders validated the Access to Information Roadmap,³¹ which outlines the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, including the process and timelines for the full implementation of the ATI 2021.

Between January 2025 to October 2025, the Ministry of Information, the Access to Information Commission and civil society organisations, organised a series of training workshops on access to information law, in line with the provisions of the Roadmap. These training workshops targeted senior Government officials, Information Officers,³² journalists³³ and members of civil society organisations.³⁴ The purpose of these training workshops

30. Paradigm Initiative, Muhammed B. Sowe 'Londa 2024 Digital Rights and Inclusion in Africa Report-The Gambia' (2025) <https://paradigmhq.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Londa-24-Gambia.pdf> (accessed 9 November 2025).

31. The Gambia News Agency 'Access to Information Law Implementation Roadmap Validated' (2025) <https://gamna.gov.gm/access-information-law-implementation-roadmap-validated> (Accessed 9 November 2025).

was to raise awareness among government officials, members of the civil society organisations and members of the public on the Access to Information Act, particularly on the use of the law, for effective implementation and enforcement. On August 26 2025, the stakeholders validated the Access to Information Regulations 2025.³⁵ The Regulations were made in furtherance of the provisions of the ATI 2021. It seeks to operationalise the provisions of the Act, particularly on matters of reproduction fees; forms used to request information from public bodies; mode of transferring request for information, among other matters. The validation of the Regulations is a step towards the enactment of the same after Cabinet and parliamentary approvals.

Despite the developments registered in 2025, there is failure by the government to proactively disclose and disseminate information using digital technologies. During the course of this research, it was noted that most government institutions do not have functional websites. This includes the government printing house, Gambia Printing Publishing Corporation. Even those institutions that have functional websites do not proactively disclose and disseminate the information required to be published under Section 7 of the ATI 2021. For example, the website of PURA does not have information on the number of reported internet disruptions from January to December 2025; the cost of internet data, among others. This is also the case for MoCDE. Government institutions also fail to respond to access

32. Gambia Press Union 'GPU engages Government Information Officers on ATI, Document Management Practices' (2025) <https://gpu.gm/gpu-engages-government-information-officers-on-ati-document-management-practices/> (Accessed 9 November 2025).
33. Gambia Press Union 'GPU Concludes Training of 100 Journalists on Open Space Investigations, Use of ATI law' (2025) <https://gpu.gm/gpu-concludes-training-of-100-journalists-on-open-source-investigations-use-of-ati-law/#:~:text=GPU%20Concludes%20Training%20of%20100,Investigations%2C%20Use%20of%20ATI%20Law> (Accessed 9 November 2025).
34. The Point Newspaper 'Civil Society organisations trained on Access to Information Law' (2025) https://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/national-news/civil-society-organisations-trained-on-access-to-information-law#google_vignette (Accessed 9 November 2025).
35. Paradise TV 'The Ministry of Information, Media and Broadcasting Services in The Gambia recently organized a validation workshop to validate draft regulations for Access to Information Law, implementation Plan and Road-map' (2025) https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1424154218876081&_rdc=1&_rd# (Accessed 9 November 2025)

to information requests, and even when they responded, they did well outside of the 21 days prescribed period in the Act. Furthermore, the Access to Information Commission also takes a considerable amount of time to determine appeals arising from access to information requests. These defects highlight the need for a comprehensive implementation of the ATI 2021. It also requires the government to put in place the necessary structure and infrastructure to facilitate timely disclosure and dissemination of information to the public. Collectively, these failures indicate that access to information in The Gambia remains largely reactive rather than proactive, undermining Principle 29 of the Declaration.

Censorship and Content

Removal; self-

censorship and arrest

and prosecution

There are no publicly reported incidents of censorship and content removal by the State during the period under review. Notwithstanding, in March 2025, the Gambia enacted the Criminal Offenses Act 2025 with provisions on sedition and false publication and broadcasting that have already been used to harass and intimidate journalists into self-censorship.³⁶ This is because these laws pressure individuals, journalists and activists to avoid publishing information that might be critical of the authorities or deemed controversial, for fear of legal penalties, imprisonment, or financial ruin.

As regards the arrest and prosecution for online speeches, Abdoulie Sanyang, an ex-soldier, was arrested on August

36. Media Foundation for West Africa 'Gambia Press Union challenges government over laws limiting press freedom' (2025) <https://mfwa.org/partner-highlights/gambia-gpu-press-freedom-laws-2025-2/> (Accessed 13 November 2025).

17 2025 at the Banjul International Airport as he was boarding to leave for Switzerland.³⁷ Mr. Sanyang was arrested over comments he made on August 14 2025, over West Coast Radio when he accused President Adama Barrow of electoral malpractices in the 2021 Presidential elections. Video and audio excerpts of Mr. Sanyang's interview were amplified online, especially on Facebook and WhatsApp platforms. The wide circulation of the audio and videos appears to have triggered the State to arrest Mr. Sanyang. The arrest was met with outrage by Gambians on Facebook. There was a public debate online that the electoral malpractices in the 2021 Presidential elections was no secret as members of President Barrow's political party have themselves admitted these facts. It has been also argued that members of the opposition, particularly the United Democratic Party, have talked about the electoral malpractices when they filed a case before the Supreme Court of The Gambia, albeit dismissed

on a technical ground. The majority of the views shows that the arrest, detention and subsequent prosecution of Mr. Sanyang for sedition is in violation of the constitutional right to freedom of expression enshrined in Section 25 of the Constitution of The Gambia 1997. The Government is accused of using repressive and draconian laws to silence citizens, including journalists, activists and social and political commentators .

Gendered Disinforma- tion

Gendered disinformation remains a persistent issue in The Gambia.³⁸ During the period under review, gendered disinformation was prevalent in public debates and discussions on women's rights issues, particularly on their political participation and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

37. The Fatu Network 'Ex-Soldier Abdoulie Sanyang Arrested After Controversial Claims on Coup and Elections' (2025) <https://fatunetwork.net/ex-soldier-abdoulie-sanyang-arrested-after-controversial-claims-on-coup-and-elections/> (Accessed 31 December 2025).

38. The Point Newspaper 'Study exposes, fear, harassment as barriers facing women in politics' (2025) <https://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/headlines/study-exposes-fear-harassment-as-barriers-facing-women-in-politics> (Accessed 31st December 2025).

These issues attract disinformation because of strong cultural and religious resistance where traditional values and religious interpretations are used to restrict women's roles in the society. This results in resistance to women's advancement. Thus, disinformation is used as a tool of technology-facilitated gender-based violence against women to enforce their silence on matters of public importance. This is done with a view to discourage women from partaking in political and public life of the country. For example, there was an increased online violence against women, journalists and human rights activists who raised their opposition to FGM.³⁹ Even though FGM is banned in The Gambia as stated in the Women's Act 2010, the practice remains highly prevalent. Recent statistics shows that 72.6% of women aged 15-49 have undergone FMG, while 45.7% of the same age group supports the continuation of the practice despite the ban.⁴⁰ A section of the Muslim population

who believe that FMG is a religious obligation, continue to challenge the authorities and remain defiant to carry on the practice. According to the BBC, online bullying, harassment and violence intensified against women and women organisations that advocate against FMG after the death of a one-month-old baby girl because of FGM.⁴¹ It is observed that comments on social media platforms, including Facebook and X, contained attacks against women, journalists and human rights activists who spoke against FGM. Also observed was the prevalence of disinformation about FGM, particularly by the supporters of the practice.

In the political arena, women continue to face bullying and targeted online harassment. This is often the case for women who wish to vie for political positions. This researcher has observed that on social media platforms, particularly Facebook and X, negative and damaging comments were made

39. Askani Gambia 'EFSCRJ Statement on 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence 2025' (2025) <https://askanigambia.com/gambia-efscrj-statement-on-16-days-of-activism-against-gender-based-violence-2025/> (Accessed 31 December 2025).

40. Orchid Project 'Data Updated: FGM/C in The Gambia April 2025' (2025) [https://www.fgmc.org/media/uploads/Country%20Research%20and%20Resources/The%20Gambia/the_gambia_data_update_v1_\(april_2025\).pdf](https://www.fgmc.org/media/uploads/Country%20Research%20and%20Resources/The%20Gambia/the_gambia_data_update_v1_(april_2025).pdf) (Accessed 31 December 2025).

to target those who declared their intentions to contest for political offices, particularly for the offices of the Presidential and National Assembly. These statements are made to discourage women from taking political positions and eventually get them to withdraw from the race.

Civil society organisations, international bodies and the Government have taken considerable steps to fight against gendered disinformation.⁴² This includes the Ministry of Information, InfoCheck and International IDEA. Training and workshops were organized in February, April, August, September, October and December 2025 on matters of disinformation

and encouraging women political participation. Nationwide campaigns were undertaken with a view to talk to members of the community about the dangers of disinformation.⁴³ These trainings addressed disinformation that occurs in online spaces.

Data Protection and

Cybersecurity

On September 29 2025, the National Assembly passed the Personal Data Protection and Privacy Bill 2025.⁴⁴ In a press release, the Ministry of

41. British Broadcasting Corporation 'Outrage as baby dies after genital mutilation in The Gambia' (2025) <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c6200g5d4jlo> (Accessed 19 November 2025).
42. The Alkamba Times 'Infocheck Unveils Ambitious 2026-2030 Plan To Combat Disinformation And Empower Gambians' <https://alkambatimes.com/infocheck-unveils-ambitious-2026-2030-plan-to-combat-disinformation-and-empower-gambians/> (Accessed 19 November 2025); Gambia Daily 'Regional Media Training Launched in Gambia to Tackle Misinformation, Disinformation' (2025) <https://gambiadaily.gov.gm/regional-media-training-launched-gambia-tackle-misinformation-disinformation> (Accessed 19 November 2025); UNESCO 'Journalists from Gambia, Guinea Bissau trained on open-source intelligence to combat disinformation' (2025) <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/journalists-gambia-guinea-bissau-trained-open-source-intelligence-combat-disinformation> (Accessed 19 November 2025); International IDEA 'National Conference on Women's Political Participation and Representation in The Gambia (2025). <https://www.idea.int/events/national-conference-womens-political-participation-and-representation-gambia> (Accessed 30 December 2025)
43. Gambia Daily 'Nationwide Campaign against Misinformation, Disinformation Begins' (2025) <https://gambiadaily.gov.gm/nationwide-campaign-against-misinformation-disinformation-begins> (Accessed 19 November 2025).
44. Block TV News ' National Assembly passes Data Protection and Privacy Bill' (2025) <https://blocktv.gambia.com/2025/09/30/national-assembly-passes-data-protection-and-privacy-bill/> (Accessed 12 November 2025).

Information, Media and Broadcasting Services described the passing of the law as a “... a major step forward in strengthening the protection of personal data, safeguarding the privacy of citizens, and building trust in The Gambia’s digital transformation journey. For the first time, it establishes a comprehensive legal framework dedicated to protecting the personal data and privacy rights of all Gambians.”⁴⁵ On November 7 2025, the President assented to the Bill. Following the President’s assent, the Act was published in The Gambia Gazette contained in G.N. No. 160/2025 dated November 13 2025. It is designated as Act No. 11 of 2025. In terms of Gambian law, the Act came into effect from the date of publication in the Gazette. Although the Personal Data Protection and Privacy Act 2025 entered into force upon gazetting, its enforcement architecture—particularly staffing, regulations, and public awareness—remains nascent.

The Act establishes core data principles, defines data subject rights, and creates enforcement mechanisms.

The provision of the basic principles in the Personal Data Protection and Privacy Act 2025 are important as they form the foundation for data rights. It enables the enforcement of data rights by individuals. They also ensure that individuals have control over data as well as protect their data from misuse. It also creates trust in the people as their data is handled with clear legal bases underpinning all activities. It also ensures accountability for data processors and controllers.

Part 4 of the Act deals with offences. The offences include unlawful processing of personal data; selling personal data; impersonating or falsely pretending to be a data subject; re-identification of personal data; alteration of personal data to prevent disclosure to a data subject; concealment of a personal data security breach; false statements made in response to a notice requesting information; and destruction or falsification of information requested by the Data Commission. The average penalty for violation of the above provisions by an individual is a minimum

45. Askanwi ‘Information Ministry Lauds Parliamentary Approval of Personal Data Protection and Privacy Bill’ (2025) <https://www.askanwi.com/news/information-ministry-lauds-parliamentary-approval-of-personal-data-protection-and-privacy-bill> (Accessed 12 November 2025)

term of imprisonment of three years, and a minimum fine equivalent to US\$6,800. For corporate bodies, the minimum fine is equivalent to US\$6,800. The courts are to impose penalties for violation in line with the minimum penalties stated above. Also, the penalties show that the above acts constitute serious offences under Gambia law (felonies) which attract severe penalties. Thus, the purpose of the severity of the penalties is to ensure deterrence.

The Act, in terms of Section 38, empowers the Access to Information Commission to administer the Act and serve as the Data Commissioner. As an independent regulatory body, the Access to Information Commission has the mandate to monitor and ensure compliance with the Act and any regulations and statutory guidance made under it, among other functions. It has the power to investigate, intervene, and enforce the provisions of the Act, as well as impose penalties and fines for non-compliance. The Access to Information Commission was already established under the ATI 2021 prior to the coming into force of the Personal Data Protection and Privacy Act 2025.

From the above, the Personal Data Protection and Privacy Act 2025

contains the key elements of what a data protection law must contain, as outlined in the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (the Malabo Convention). The Malabo Convention was adopted on June 27 2014, and entered into force in 2023. Although The Gambia signed the Malabo Convention on December 2 2022, it is yet to ratify the same for its domestication. Notwithstanding the non-ratification of the Malabo Convention, The Gambia has, through the Personal Data Protection and Privacy Act 2025, incorporated the basic and core principles of data processing; established the rights of data subjects; obligations of the controllers and processors; established an independent regulatory body that monitors and enforces the law, with powers to impose sanctions for non-compliance, among other matters. Thus, The Gambia made substantial strides in 2025 when it passed into law the Personal Data Protection and Privacy Act 2025, which came into force on November 13 2025.

Cyber security

As stated in the 2024 report, the Cyber

Crime Bill 2023 was committed by the Plenary of the National Assembly to the National Assembly Select Committee on Education and Information Communication and Technology (Select Committee) for consideration and scrutiny.⁴⁶ Following the referral of the bill to it by the Plenary, the Select Committee undertook consultations with respective stakeholders. The stakeholders include government institutions, civil society organisations and individuals with expertise in cyber security.⁴⁷ Some of the key recommendations of the Select Committee include confiscation of the proceeds of crimes relating to child pornography; deletion of vague computer crimes by specifying the acts; judicial oversight for interception of content by law enforcement institutions; extension of the period of preservation of data; criminalisation of child grooming, child solicitation and online human trafficking; criminalisation of recording

of private conversation without prior notice; criminalization of cyber extortion.

The above indicates that the Cyber Crime Bill 2023 has gone through thorough consultations with stakeholders. The Select Committee has endeavoured to take into account the views of the civil society organisations and individuals experts on cyber security. This is evidence of the collaboration between the National Assembly and civil society organisations in the law making process. Even though some civil society organisations have initially raised concerns about some of the provisions of the bill as having the potential to freedom of expression and digital,⁴⁸ the Select Committee has taken into account these concerns in their scrutiny. It has recommended for judicial oversight in the case of interception of data by law enforcement, and the deletion of controversial provisions that have an impact on press freedom, freedom of expression and digital rights. These

46. Paradigm Initiative, Muhammed B Sowe, 'Londa 2024 Digital Rights and Inclusion in Africa Report-The Gambia' (2025) <https://paradigmhq.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Londa-24-Gambia.pdf> (accessed 9 November 2025).

47. National Assembly of The Gambia 'Draft Report of the National Assembly Select Committee on Education and Information Communication and Technology on the Cyber Crime Bill 2023' (2025).

48. Paradigm Initiative Muhammed B Sowe, 'Londa 2024 Digital Rights and Inclusion in Africa Report-The Gambia' (2025) <https://paradigmhq.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Londa-24-Gambia.pdf> (accessed 9 November 2025).

recommendations have been adopted by the Plenary of the National Assembly. There were strong indications that the bill will be passed into law in December 2025. However, it did not happen by the end of December 2025.

On September 19 2025, the Communication Bill 2025 was published in the Gazette No. 43 GN No. 133/2025 Vol. 142. The Gazetting is the first process in the legislation-making process, and serves as a notice to the public about the intention of the Government to introduce a legislative proposal. This bill seeks to repeal the Information and Communications Act 2009, and provide for the development, effective functioning and regulation of the electronic communications sector, information, media broadcasting and electronic commerce in The Gambia. Sub-part 8 of the Bill deals with cyber security issues. The bill empowers the Minister of Communication and Digital Economy to develop, publish, maintain, and oversee the implementation of a national cybersecurity policy strategy and other related cyber security instruments, as well as develop enforcement measures. The Minister is also mandated to enforce compliance and audit in close cooperation with other stakeholders in the cybersecurity ecosystem. The concentration of cybersecurity powers

with the Minister of MoCDE creates several risks, including that decisions of the Minister may align more with political expediency instead of technical best practices. Also, it reduces accountability as overconcentration of power weakens oversight bodies such as the National Assembly from holding the minister accountable for his decisions. Furthermore, ministers as political appointees often have limited expertise on cybersecurity so as to enable them meet with the emerging challenges of the sector.

The Bill proposes the establishment of The Gambia Computer Security and Incident Response Team, tasked with the main responsibility of receiving and assessing reports of cybersecurity incidents and threats from operators of critical infrastructure and other relevant parties. It also proposes the designation and registration of critical information infrastructure essential for national security and the economic and social well-being of citizens. It also outlines duties and obligations of operators of critical information infrastructure, the breach of which is an offence.

The Gambia's Digital ID

System

The Gambia is part of the ECOWAS National Biometric ID Card scheme for cross-border use meant to promote inter-regional trade and integration.⁴⁹ The biometric system in The Gambia extends to passports, alien cards, non-Gambian IDs, residence permits and driving licences. In October 2018, The Gambia initiated the issuance of biometric ID Cards.⁵⁰ As a result, the Government has adopted a policy to stop producing and issuing non-biometric ID cards and other documents. The rights implication of The Gambia's policy on biometric ID includes significant privacy and data protection risks; potential for mass surveillance; threat of exclusion; and discrimination.

On March 29 2025, QTV reported that it received information from credible sources that the Government of The Gambia through the Ministry of Interior awarded the National Identity Document Systems and Digital ID Project contract to Margin's ID Group of Ghana.⁵¹ Margins ID Group is contracted to carry out the production of ID cards and other national documents in The Gambia. To date, the Ministry of Interior has not come out to inform the public about the details of the contract signed with Margins ID Group. Like the previous ID Card contracts with Simplex Group, the contract with Margins ID Group is shrouded with secrecy causing civil society organisations to call for transparency.⁵² Despite the award of the contract for the production of ID cards and other national documents, Gambians continued to show their

49. Paradigm Initiative 'Londa 2024 Digital Rights and Include Report in Africa: The Gambia (2024) <https://paradigm-hq.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Londa-24-Gambia.pdf> (Accessed 12 November 2025)

50. United Nations Economic Commission for Africa 'Gambia National Digital Identity Strategy: Strategy Report' (2023) https://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/TCND/Digital%20ID%20Transformation%20Strategy%20_Gambia%20V_9.pdf (accessed 13 November 2025).

51. QTV 'Sources have confirmed to QTV that a major government National Identity Document Systems and Digital ID project has been awarded to Margins ID Group of Ghana, following a bidding process' (2025) <https://web.facebook.com/watch/?v=1984610305282299> (Accessed 31 December 2025)

52. The Point Newspaper 'EFSCRJ demands transparency on issue of passports, national documents' (2025) <https://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/national-news/efscrj-demands-transparency-on-issue-of-passports-national-documents> (Accessed 17 November 2025).

displeasure over the slow process of the issuance of ID Cards.

On January 30 2025, The Gambia Immigration Department (GID) announced resumption of the production and issuance of Machine Readable Passports (MRPs). Throughout December 2024 MRPs were not issued. MRPs are issued to Gambians living abroad who cannot access biometric passports. In March 2025, the production and issuances of MRPs stopped because of undisclosed technical challenges. It was not until May 19 2025 that GID announced that the production of Machine Readable Passports (MRPs) had officially resumed. On August 21 2025, GID announced a regional biometric passport mobile enrolment service across 5 regions of The Gambia to ensure accessibility and remove the need to travel from the regions to Banjul to process a passport. This move has facilitated access to national identification documents to people in provincial Gambia, who struggle to obtain these documents.

The failure of the government to produce ID Cards and other national documents within a reasonable time has caused difficulties for thousands of Gambians and non-Gambians who

are without ID cards, driving licenses and resident permits. The lack of ID Cards and other documents constitutes a violation of digital rights. This is because it has a negative impact on people's access to digital and non-digital services and fulfilment of rights, thus depriving them of inclusion. It created a barrier to people's access to public service, financial services, SIM registration, travel, social protection, among others. Given the situation, the Government could have resorted to issuing non-biometric ID cards as a temporary measure or an alternative. The provisions of the National Identity Cards Regulations 1993 anticipate the production and issuance of non-biometric ID cards. Additionally, the said Regulation has not been amended to make provision for the issuance of only biometric ID cards by The Gambia Immigration Department. The issuance of non-biometric ID cards is necessary and reasonable in the light of the unavailability of biometric ID cards. This will ensure accessibility of national identification documents to the people.

In June 2025, the President of The Gambia announced Government's plans to integrate the ID cards with an Electronic Civil Registration and Vital Statistics, passport, and other

identification databases to create a unified digital ID system that is locally designed, built, operated, and managed by government services.⁵³ According to the President, the purpose of the initiative is to strengthen internal security, and modernise the national identity card management and national security infrastructure. On November 19 2025, the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Bill, 2025 was presented to the National Assembly for First Reading.⁵⁴ This Bill seeks to create and integrate the ID cards with an Electronic Civil Registration and Vital Statistics, passport, and other identification documents. A key provision in the Bill is the protection of data. Section 14 of the Bill requires the Civil Registration Directorate to protect data in its possession and control against loss, unauthorised destruction, access or disclosure. The Civil Registration Directorate must also process personal data in a manner that ensures appropriate security of the personal data.

Even though the adoption of a digital ID system will enhance security and efficient identification for crime prevention, it has the potential for mass surveillance. A biometric system can enable the Government to monitor the movements and actions of individuals as well as profile them. Also, the storage of biometric data can result in violation of the right to privacy especially when it is not properly done. In the event of a data breach, the passports of biometric information cannot be changed, thus creating a permanent risk of identity theft and fraud. Thus, there is the need for the Government to provide further safeguards for the protection of digital rights of people. There is a need for the National Assembly to undertake consultations with more civil society organisations, particularly those who engage in the promotion of digital rights, before passing the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Bill, 2025. This is necessary to ensure that the principles of data protection are clearly incorporated in the proposed legislation.

53. The Point Newspaper 'Gov't to integrate ID cards with Electronic Civil Registration' (2025) <https://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/headlines/govt-to-integrate-id-cards-with-electronic-civil-registration> (Accessed 17 November 2025).

54. National Assembly of The Gambia (2025) https://web.facebook.com/GambiaAssembly/posts/fourth-ordinary-session-of-the-national-assembly-in-the-2025-legislative-year-or/1162797119377826/?_rdc=1&_rdr# (Accessed 30 December 2025).

Privacy and Surveil- lance

Section²³ of the Constitution guarantees the right to privacy. This provision states that one's right to privacy can only be interfered with in accordance with the law. In the year²⁰²⁵, there have been no publicly reported incidents of violations of the right to privacy by the State or its agents. Furthermore, there are no publicly reported incidents of government surveillance on private communications for the period under review.

In June 2025, the Government announced plans to install CCTV systems along the major highways and other strategic locations. These will be linked to a traffic management centre for real-time monitoring and law enforcement. The installation of CCTV systems, although important for law enforcement and traffic management, raises serious concerns about broad surveillance, data retention and potential misuse of advanced

features like facial recognition which is foreseeable. This is the case especially in the absence of a law or regulation to govern the use of the CCTV systems in public spaces thereby violating privacy rights. Thus, to mitigate the risks, the Government should adopt a clear, legal framework regulating public surveillance, including strict necessity, proportionality, data retention limits, and independent oversight.

Developments in

ICT and Emerging

Technologies

The Gambia has no legislation on AI and emerging technologies such as blockchain and quantum computing for the period under review. There is a significant impact associated with the absence of legislation on AI and emerging technologies. This includes creating a vacuum gap in the governance. This has the potential to increase risks of algorithmic bias, discrimination, privacy violations

and lack of accountability. It also undermines fundamental rights including privacy and autonomy, while also fostering distrust and hindering responsible innovation by leaving developers and users without clear standards and remedies. The impact of such a gap encourages uncontrolled development, allowing autonomous systems to cause harm in critical areas like justice and defence, necessitating urgent calls for global, human rights-focused frameworks to ensure these technologies benefit humanity rather than harm it. Notwithstanding the above, for the first time, the National Digital Economy Master Plan 2023-2033 recognises the need to develop a policy and strategy for promoting AI research, development, adoption, and application.⁵⁶ There have not been any developments in the area of AI for 2025.

Digital Inclusion

Digital inclusion of Persons with disabilities (PWDs), women and children

As stated in the 2024 Report, PWDs continue to be marginalised in the decision-making process, including in the use of ICTs for development.⁵⁷ The exclusion of PWDs in the decision-making processes in the ICT sector is due to different factors. This includes stigma as a result of cultural and religious beliefs; weak policy implementation; lack of resources; physical and digital accessibility barriers; insufficient consultation during policy design and implementation, which results in exclusion, among others. Despite the adoption of several Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) policies and strategies, 2025 has not witnessed any progress in terms of the inclusion of PWDs, women and children in the development of the ICT sector. This situation yet again presents the need for the inclusion of vulnerable groups in ICT

56. Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy 'National Digital Economy Master Plan 2023-2033' (2025) <https://mocde.gov.gm/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Final-The-Gambia-Digital-Economy-Master-Plan-2023-20233.pdf> (Accessed 19 November 2025)

57. Paradigm Initiative 'Londa 2024 Digital Rights and Inclusion in Africa Report-The Gambia' (2025) <https://paradigmhq.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Londa-24-Gambia.pdf> (accessed 12 November 2025)

development in The Gambia.

In October and December 2024, the Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy developed and validated⁵⁸ the Gambia's National Child and Vulnerable Groups Online Protection Policy.⁵⁹ The Policy was made as part of the Western Africa Regional Digital Integration Programme. The purpose of the Policy is to ensure a safe, secure and supportive digital environment for all children and vulnerable groups, including women, persons with disabilities and older persons in The Gambia where their rights are protected, their well-being is prioritised, and they are empowered to leverage the full potential of digital technology for sustainable growth and development. It also aims at inclusion of children, women, persons with disabilities

and older persons in the digital landscape of The Gambia. The implementation of the policy commenced in 2025. The Government noted that a proposed new legislation on telecommunications will contain provisions requiring regulatory bodies, service providers, and equipment standards are all guided to ensure safe online access for children, balancing freedom of expression with necessary controls.⁶⁰

Digital Inclusion

As at November 26 2025, The Gambia has not established the Universal Service Fund (USF). While the Information and Communications Act 2009 (the ICA) and the Universal Access and Service Policy 2020⁶¹ envisage the establishment of the

58. The Point Newspaper 'Gov't validates policy to protect child & vulnerable groups online' (2024) <https://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/headlines/govt-validates-policy-to-protect-child-and-vulnerable-groups-online> (accessed 19 November 2025).

59. Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy 'The Gambia's National Child and Vulnerable Groups Online Protection Policy' (2024) <https://mocde.gov.gm/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Gambia-CVGOP-Policy.docx#:~:text=Introduction%20and%20Background-,The%20Gambia's%20National%20Child%20and%20Vulnerable%20Groups%20Online%20Protection%20Policy,vulnerable%20groups%20as%20a%20strategic> (Accessed 19 November 2025)

60. Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy Facebook account https://web.facebook.com/100070229588702/posts/hon-lamin-jabbiwe-have-validated-an-online-protection-policy-for-children-and-vu/824778166539829/?_rdc=1&_rdr# (Accessed on 31 December 2025)

61. Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy 'Universal Access and Service Policy 2020' <https://mocde.gov.gm/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Universal-Access-Service-Policy-2020.pdf> (Accessed 19 November 2025).

USF, the same has not been achieved for 15 years since it was introduced in the ICA. The delay in setting up the USF stems from the lack of political will and commitment from the Government of The Gambia. While policies have been developed around USF, the actual setting up of the fund has not happened. The absence of the USF continues to increase the mobile broadband connectivity gap in The Gambia, like many other African countries.⁶² This is because the primary purpose of the USF is to bridge the

gap in access to telecommunication connectivity between urban areas with high income and rural areas with low income. This affects access and affordability of telecommunication services by rural areas in The Gambia, as telecommunication service providers do not have access to subsidies provided by USF to provide affordable internet services to the rural population. To close the gap in connectivity in The Gambia, it is important to prioritise the establishment of the USF.

Conclusion

In 2025, The Gambia made some moderate efforts in its digital landscape. The period witnessed considerable increase in the number of internet users by population compared to 2024, as reported by DataReportal's Digital 2025 Report . The data protection law was enacted by the National Assembly, and the Cyber Crime Bill also underwent considerable

stakeholders' consultations and scrutiny. The Communications Bill 2025 was introduced to make detailed provisions on cyber security. Despite these efforts, the report highlights the challenges that still exist. The Gambia continues to suffer from internet disruptions occasioned by vandalism, poor speed connectivity and exorbitantly high cost of mobile data due

62. GSMA Intelligence 'Universal service funds in Africa Policy reforms to enhance effectiveness' (2023) <https://www.gsma.com/about-us/regions/sub-saharan-africa/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/USF-Africa.pdf> (Accessed 19 November 2025)

to poor telecommunication infrastructure and technology. Also, The Gambia still maintains laws on sedition and false publication criminalisation despite directions from the ECOWAS Community Court in the case of Federation of African Journalist & 4 Ords v The Gambia ECW/CCJ/JUD/04/18 for these laws to be repealed on the basis that they are a violation of freedom of expression, media

freedom and digital rights. The Access to Information Act 2021 is yet to be fully implemented, thus there is absence of proactive disclosure of information by public institutions. These challenges have caused the country to score moderately compliant for the year 2025 based on TheScore Index.

Recommendations

The Government should:

- Invest and develop telecommunication infrastructure so as to enable internet accessibility and limit the cause of internet disruptions and slow internet connection.
- Increase the national budget allocation for ICT research and development in order to meet the need to improve and develop the telecommunication infrastructure
- Establish and operationalise the Universal Service Fund to address affordability gaps, particularly for rural communities and marginalised groups.
- Prioritise the repealing of all laws that impede freedom of expression and the media as directed by the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice in the case of Federation of African Journalist & 4 Ors v The Gambia ECW/CCJ/JUD/04/18.
- Fully implement the Access to Information Act 2021 so as to ensure proactive disclosure and dissemination of information to the public.
- Promote and ensure the inclusion and participation of vulnerable

groups in the formulation of policies and ICT developments.

- Resort to issuing non-biometric ID cards as a temporary measure or an alternative in the event of a breakdown in the issuance of biometric ID cards.
- Adopt laws, regulations and clear guidelines which govern the use of face recognition technologies and surveillance including CCTVs in major public spaces.

The Media should:

- Work with civil society organisations (CSOs) to raise public awareness on digital rights in The Gambia.
- Engage the Government and the National Assembly to repeal all the laws that affect freedom of expression and of the media.
- Engage the Government on the implementation of the Access to Information Act 2021.
- Engage the Government on the harassment and intimidation of journalists and media personnel.
- Undertake public interest litigation on behalf of journalists who are subject to harassment or intimidation by the Government, and/or provide legal support to journalists in conflict with the Government.

The National Assembly should:

- Engage and consider views of members of the media and CSOs on the Cyber Crime Bill 2023 and so as to remove provisions that threaten digital rights and freedom of expression.
- Prioritise passing the Cyber Crime Bill 2023.

Civil Society Organisations should:



- Engage and lobby members of the National Assembly to pass the Cyber Crime Bill 2023 by taking into account the concerns raised by CSOs and to incorporate provisions that meet international standards.
- Undertake public awareness programs on freedom of expression and of the media as well as digital rights.
- Continue to advocate for independence of the media, freedom of expression and digital rights.
- Engage members of the National Assembly and Ministry of Justice for the repealing of laws on sedition and all other laws that hinder freedom of expression and digital rights in the Gambia.

The private section should:











- Comply with data protection standards prescribed in the Personal Data Protection and Privacy Act 2025 by ensuring that data is processed lawfully, transparently and safely.
- Partner with the Government and CSOs to organise digital literacy training and awareness programs.
- Actively participate in digital forum platforms and dialogues with a view to align business practices with human rights standards on data protection and privacy.
- Invest and promote affordable digital payment systems to enable rural population and small businesses to participate in the formal digital economy.









The Score Index





The Gambia, 2025

1 = Totally non-compliant; 2 = Mildly compliant; 3 = Moderately compliant;
4 = Considerably compliant; 5 = Fully compliant

Indicator	ACHPR Principle	2024 Score	2024 Score	2025 Justification
Internet Shutdowns	P38(2)			Since January 2017, the Government of The Gambia has not shut down any social media platforms.
Inexistent laws, policies and other measures to promote universal, equitable, affordable and meaningful access to the internet	P37			Laws in The Gambia such as Persons with Disabilities Act 2021 that promotes the inclusion of vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities in national development initiatives including ICT development. Similarly, The Gambia has adopted several policies including the Digital Transformation Strategy for The Gambia 2023-2028 and the National Digital Economy Master Plan 2023-2032 that speak to the promotion of affordability and accessible internet to marginalised and vulnerable groups. Notwithstanding the law and policies, the period under review has not shown any progress in the promotion and inclusion of marginalised groups to affordable internet access.
False News Criminalisation	P22(2)			Section 152 of the Criminal Offences Act 2025 criminalises false publication and broadcasting

Indicator	ACHPR Principle	2024 Score	2024 Score	2025 Justification
Sedition Legislation	P22(2)			Sections 45 and 54 of the Criminal Offences Act 2025 criminalises inciting a member of the armed forces or the police force to sedition, and seditious enterprise. August 21 2025, one Abdoulie Sanyang, an ex-member of The Gambia Armed Forces, was charged with seditious intention before the Kanifing Magistrates' Court
Arbitrary Arrests and Harassments of the Media, HRDs and Citizens	P20(1) & (2)			<p>There was intimidation of journalists particularly when in March 2025 the Minister of Information summoned the Editor in Chief of The Voice Newspaper; the Media Council; and the Newspaper Publishers Association. The summon was in connection to a report in The Voice Newspaper about a survey conducted by a local CSO in The Gambia.</p> <p>Comments by the President accusing the media of reporting false news and having the intention of promoting conflict and instability in the country.</p> <p>On August 21 2025, one Abdoulie Sanyang, was arrested and charged for comments made over a talk show on West Coast Radio when he accused President Adama Barrow of electoral malpractices in the 2021 Presidential elections.</p>
Data Protection Legislation.	P42			On September 29 2025, the National Assembly enacted the Personal Data Protection and Privacy Act 2025. On November 7 2025, the President as-

Indicator	ACHPR Principle	2024 Score	2024 Score	2025 Justification
				sent to the Bill, which comments its entry into force.
Online Content Removal Without Process	P38 and P39(4)			There is no reported incident in 2025 where the Gambian government interfered and required the removal of on-line content by internet intermediaries.
Invasion of Privacy of Communications	P41			There is no reported incident in 2025 where there was invasion of privacy of communications. However, the Cyber Crime Bill 2023, which is currently being considered by the National Assembly, contains provisions that have the potential to enable invasion of privacy of communications.
Failure by the government to proactively disclose and disseminate information digital technologies.	P29(3)			The websites of most government institutions do not comply with the Access to Information Act 2021 by proactively disclosing and disseminating information.
AI and Emerging Technologies national strategies	P39(6)			National Digital Economy Master Plan 2023-2033 recognises the need to develop a policy and strategy for promoting AI research, development, adoption, and application. Thus, there is an attempt and recognition to develop policies.

Indicator	ACHPR Principle	2024 Score	2024 Score	2025 Justification
Adoption of specific child laws, policies and measures promoting children’s digital safety and privacy online	P37(5)			The Gambia has developed The Gambia’s National Child and Vulnerable Groups Online Protection Policy since October 2024. The aim of this policy is to promote and ensure a safe, secure and supportive digital environment for all children and vulnerable groups including women, persons with disabilities and older persons in The Gambia.
Digital Inclusion	P37(3)			The Gambia commenced the implementation of the National Child and Vulnerable Groups Online Protection Policy, which seeks the inclusion of children, women, persons with disabilities and older persons in the digital landscape of The Gambia.
Total (out of 60):	2024: 31	<div style="background-color: #0070C0; color: white; padding: 20px; text-align: center;"> <p>2025</p> <p>34</p> </div>		



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