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Google

Media Literacy Policy Study

Report 1

Putting media literacy on the map – a snapshot of policies and practices in Europe

October 2024

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1.0
Introduction

Ecorys is delighted to present this report examining media literacy activities in Europe. The research was conducted on behalf of Google Europe as part of a wider media literacy policy study. The research was conducted between August 2023 and May 2024 and draws on a review of documents and the generous inputs of stakeholders who have contributed time for interviews and surveys. The Ecorys team also worked closely with independent expert advisers from LSE's Department of Media and Communications, who provided support and challenge throughout the project.

The report aims to provide insight into European policy and practice on media literacy, both a resource for the sector and to help inform collaboration across industry, public sector, and civil society. It is presented alongside a separate report that examines Google's own media literacy actions in more depth, including options for the development of evaluation and monitoring arrangements, and a series of short policy briefs that examine specific topics that have arisen from this work. An infographic, providing a snapshot of this European media literacy landscape, is also published separately. The views expressed in this report are the authors' alone.

The main report is split into three main sections:

› This first sub-section explains the aims and scope, including the approach to compiling the case studies. The section then goes on to present an overview of the European media literacy context, including key indicators, policy developments and relevant results from a survey of stakeholders conducted as part of this study. It concludes with an overview of relevant institutions, stakeholders, and initiatives.

› The main body of the report presents eight country case studies. Each of these case studies can be read as standalone parts of the report to provide an overview and insight into aspects of media literacy in each of the selected countries. The case studies all draw on a combination of desk research and a selection of targeted qualitative stakeholder interviews.

› The report concludes with a high-level synthesis of themes that were observed through the country and stakeholder research. The final sections conclude with high-level recommendations to develop broad-based media literacy strategies through muti-stakeholder collaboration and mainstreaming of media literacy education activities.

The Appendix includes a compilation of inspiring examples of media literacy initiatives, drawn from the eight countries in focus for this report. It features initiatives that have been supported by Google, and other examples originating with public authorities, media associations and civil society organisations, to illustrate the range of approaches that have been taken to support media literacy in different country contexts across Europe.

1.1 Aims and scope

This report presents an analysis of media literacy policy and funding activities in Europe. It showcases policies and practices for EU stakeholders who are working in the field of media literacy. This aims to present:

› A current snapshot of what's happening across Europe in the media literacy space and the state-of-the-sector.

› An appraisal of opportunities and challenges as viewed by key stakeholders, and how EU Member States are responding.

› Deeper dives into the eight case study countries, showcasing policies and practices and gathering insights from the sector.

› Illustrative examples of a range of media literacy initiatives from across Europe, as inspiration for those commissioning or delivering MLIs.

› Overarching conclusions and recommendations for the ongoing development and implementation of effective media literacy activities that arise from the research.

Media literacy (ML) is a broad and dynamic concept that continues to evolve in response to technological, social, cultural and political developments. At its core, it involves the development of the cognitive, technical and social skills needed to make informed choices about content and how to interact, contribute and participate in different media environments. At the same time media literacy is also fundamentally linked to the broader objectives of supporting informed, democratic, inclusive, and open societies. As a result media literacy education and other interventions also aim to empower people to participate as informed and active citizens.

This includes enabling citizens to critically evaluate media content and sources, understand how media production processes work and role in shaping information landscapes, and empower them to shape the role that important role that media, including participation on social media, plays in their democracy and society.[1]

Capturing the above understanding of ML as dynamic and multifaceted, we adopt a broad operational definition of ML as set out by the EU 2020 Council conclusions[2] that media literacy is an umbrella expression that:

'Includes all the technical, cognitive, social, civic, ethical and creative capacities that allow a citizen to access and use information and media effectively, and to safely and responsibly create and share media content through different platforms'.

Figure 1: Establishing study scope – proximal and distal initiatives, tools and programmes

Central focus of study: strict understanding of media literacy

Considered within scope: closely linked media verification initiatives (targeting media information, tactics and/or sources)

Considered within scope: products tools and features directly enabling/supporting media literacy competence development

Outside scope of study: wider initiatives that operate in the information ecosystem

Source: Ecorys (2023)

In the context of this study, the primary focus is on media literacy initiatives (MLI) that aim to develop the competencies, knowledge and awareness of citizens and users, including the development of critical thinking skills, in relation to different media. This covers a range of different types of actions and initiatives including:

> **Media literacy education and training initiatives** that may be implemented through a range of curricula and resources to equip users with independent media literacy skills, knowledge, or competencies.

> **Awareness-raising campaigns** that highlight relevant media literacy issues, challenges and risks, as well as psychosocial interventions to prompt behaviours when online, e.g. prebunking campaigns.[3]

> **Tools or resources** that enable users to verify and critically appraise information, including for example fact-checking initiatives, other community-based or capacity building initiatives, or associated tools.

Many media literacy actions are also set in the context of a wider range of education and training measures that have many overlapping dimensions and emphases. These include, but are not limited to, educational agendas such as digital skills and literacy, as well as active citizenship. ML has a strong digital literacy component, reflecting the importance of digital tools and platforms, and the influence of algorithms and AI in media production and choices.[4] Being media literate also means being able to responsibly and safely use digital media services and engage with others in the public sphere, as well as fulfilling the creative and participatory potential that new technologies and services can offer. In addition, there are also a range of associated online safety agendas, as well as counter-radicalisation agendas, that interact with media literacy themes and methodologies. The relationship between media literacy and associated agendas is a theme that is highlighted across several of the country case studies and is an area of consideration for the future development of media literacy education and training initiatives.

Throughout the case studies and overarching synthesis, the study does examine how media literacy actions are set in the context of media regulation and policy agendas to address the prevalence of mis- and disinformation online.

Whilst media regulation is not the principal focus of the report, the impact of these measures on the media risks that citizens may encounter is a significant counterpart to any media literacy efforts. The nature of risks that users are likely to encounter will inevitably shape the necessary scale, scope, and focus of broader media literacy strategies and actions. The study does not, however, directly examine the architecture and design of online platforms where they do not directly engage the user in terms of their awareness of potential risks and media literate behaviours, such as content moderation, behavioural influences, or algorithms.

1.2 Approach

This report is based on eight national case studies of media literacy activities. These case studies were compiled through a programme of desk research and interviews with national stakeholders, including policymakers, industry representatives, civil society and media literacy practitioners. The case studies compile a snapshot of the current approaches and priorities for media literacy in each country. This includes:

> The **current policy and regulatory context**, including national approaches to key European policy and regulatory agendas concerning media literacy.

> **Contemporary risks and trends** in relation to media literacy, including for example specific national political dynamics that are shaping current policy responses.

> A **review of existing media literacy activities and actions**, including the identification of key organisations and initiatives.

> Each national case study also features a small selection of local **media literacy initiatives** that illustrate the types of efforts that are being supported at country-levels. This includes a mix of Google-supported and non-Google-supported initiatives. This approach was selected in order to situate Google's initiatives within the wider landscape of media literacy initiatives at local levels.

> The case studies conclude with a **brief assessment of future and emerging issues**, including responses to emergent technologies, specifically generative AI.

The case studies aim to offer a range of perspectives and experiences in relation to media literacy policy and practice in Europe. To approach this systematically, the eight countries were selected with attention to:

› the different national policy and regulatory contexts within which media literacy is supported in Europe

› differences in underlying population characteristics, including digital skills, media awareness and exposure to disinformation; and,

› geographical balance across the regions of Europe.

Annex One provides further detail on how these criteria were operationalised at the selection stage.

Having selected the countries, three individual initiatives were selected from each case study country. The initiatives included examples with different sources of funding and partnership arrangements, originating with public authorities, media associations and civil society organisations, and to achieve representation of diverse target populations. In each case, shortlisted initiatives were checked to ensure that there had been sufficient implementation to provide sound and verifiable evidence for the report. Annex Four presents these nested examples of initiatives in detail and includes a matrix to assist with navigation across countries.

The case studies were compiled by country research teams using a common structure, including shared semi-structured interview protocols and reporting templates. However, the precise content of case studies, including data collection activities, has been adapted to reflect the specificities of each country and is not intended to present a direct comparative assessment. The report also draws on feedback gathered from stakeholders through an online survey. Over 100 interviews were conducted throughout the course of the study and an additional 58 stakeholders were consulted via the survey. Annex Two provides a high-level overview of how these various strands of data collection and stakeholder consultations came together to inform the report, while Annex 3 showcases the relevant stakeholder consultation research tools.

The report concludes with a synthesis of the country case studies. This draws out some high-level themes that have emerged, including areas for future consideration. A series of recommendations aimed at policymakers, practitioners, and media companies, including technology firms are presented.

1.3 Context

Across Europe, media literacy is an increasingly important topic on national policy agendas amid rising concerns about mis- and disinformation and rapidly advancing technology. European countries generally score well on measures related to media literacy, including skills and competencies of citizens.[5] However, whilst Europe generally scores fairly well on measures such as press freedom European citizens consistently highlight concerns about the prevalence of misleading information across the internet and news sites. For example, in 2023 nearly 50% of European citizens had encountered untrue or doubtful information or content over the previous three months.[6] At the same time, just 24% of individuals had checked the truthfulness of the information or content they found on the internet, news sites or social media over the same period. The OECD has highlighted the important link between access to digital learning opportunities and basic digital skills, and the propensity to verify and check information online.[7] However, whilst comparatively high in global terms, 71% of adults in Europe have basic or above basic digital skills, of which only 40% have above-basic skills.[8] Furthermore, there are significant disparities between – and within – European countries based on socio-economic background, education, and age.

There is a long-standing EU policy framework in relation to media literacy that is embedded in the Audio-Visual Media Directive. The AVMD requires Member States to support media literacy skills as part of their media regulation activities and duties.[9] The EU's Creative Europe funding programme has also supported the development of a range of media literacy projects. **At the European level, actions to address media literacy objectives are relatively well developed and are welcomed by media literacy policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders**. For example, feedback from media literacy stakeholders and practitioners to this study highlighted general support for European-level actions and approaches.[10] This included general support for governance and cross-sectoral collaboration arrangements, funding, mechanisms for public dialogue and EU laws and policies to empower media literacy sectors (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Suitability of Europe's laws, policies and institutions for the changing media literacy landscape

Legend:
- Extremely fit for purpose
- Very fit for purpose
- Moderately fit for purpose
- Slightly fit for purpose
- Not at all fit for purpose
- Don't know

Category	Extremely fit	Very fit	Moderately fit	Slightly fit	Not at all fit	Don't know
EU funds, programmes and initiatives focused on media literacy	13	6	18	9	2	10
Channels and mechanisms for public dialogue and consultation	7	4	21	11	2	13
Media literacy frameworks, tools and quality standards	7	9	17	12	8	5
EU laws and policies to regulate the media sector	6	11	20	7	5	9
EU governance and cross-sectoral collaboration arrangements	3	11	23	3	5	13

The extent to which European countries have taken concerted action to support media literacy at national levels is less clear, however. Education remains a Member State competency, including curricula, meaning that approaches to education initiatives with relevance to media literacy remain diverse. Furthermore, feedback from the European Regulators group suggests that media literacy actions remain a relatively underdeveloped element of national regulatory and policy activities.[11] These concerns were substantiated in feedback to a survey of media literacy practitioners and stakeholders that was conducted for this study. As seen in Figure 3, of 58 respondents to the survey a majority (n.30) highlighted **the issue of low prioritisation of ML in education curricula** as 'extremely important'. Low prioritisation in **public policy** was also cited as a particularly pressing concern (24 rated this as extremely important). This was also set alongside concern about the impact of high levels of public mistrust of media organisations (21 rated this as extremely important).

In addition, **feedback to the survey also highlighted persistent issues in relation to the prioritisation of underserved or minority groups in the context of media literacy actions**. Feedback to the survey highlights the sensitivity and complexity of targeted media literacy interventions focused on specific groups in the context of polarised political landscapes (Figure 4). For example, survey respondents highlighted a perception of low demand or perceived need for media literacy actions amongst specific groups (17 extremely important). Linked to the above, **stakeholder feedback also highlighted persistent issues in relation to a lack of reliable data to understand different media literacy needs and priorities of different groups** (14 extremely important), and deficient recognition of specific target groups in media literacy policies and actions (13 extremely important). Other issues highlighted included successfully engaging professionals working with vulnerable or seldom-heard groups and the relative prioritisation of these issues vis-a-vis other topics.

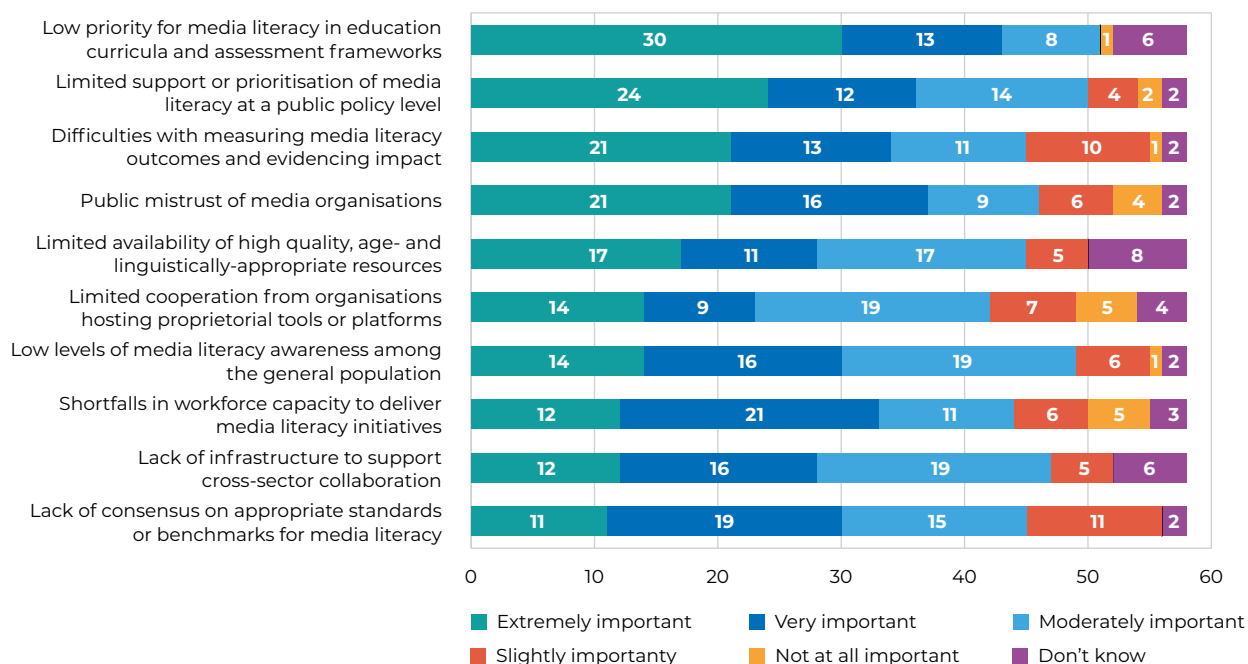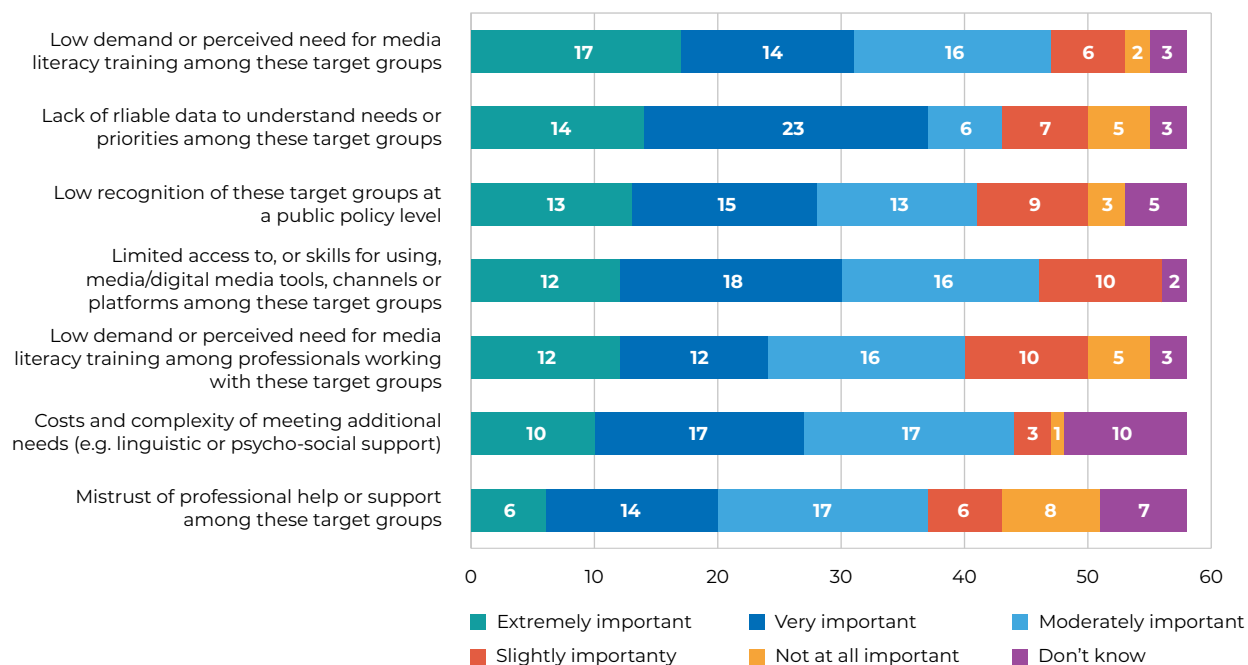## Figure 3: Main challenges for implementing media literacy actions

Challenge	Extremely important	Very important	Moderately important	Slightly important	Not at all important	Don't know
Low priority for media literacy in education curricula and assessment frameworks	30	13	8	1	1	6
Limited support or prioritisation of media literacy at a public policy level	24	12	14	4	2	2
Difficulties with measuring media literacy outcomes and evidencing impact	21	13	11	10	1	2
Public mistrust of media organisations	21	16	9	6	4	2
Limited availability of high quality, age- and linguistically-appropriate resources	17	11	17	5		8
Limited cooperation from organisations hosting proprietorial tools or platforms	14	9	19	7	5	4
Low levels of media literacy awareness among the general population	14	16	19	6	1	2
Shortfalls in workforce capacity to deliver media literacy initiatives	12	21	11	6	5	3
Lack of infrastructure to support cross-sector collaboration	12	16	19	5		6
Lack of consensus on appropriate standards or benchmarks for media literacy	11	19	15	11		2

Legend: Extremely important, Very important, Moderately important, Slightly importanty, Not at all important, Don't know

Figure 4: Media literacy challenges amongst vulnerable or seldom heard groups

Challenge	Extremely important	Very important	Moderately important	Slightly important	Not at all important	Don't know
Low demand or perceived need for media literacy training among these target groups	17	14	16	6	2	3
Lack of rliable data to understand needs or priorities among these target groups	14	23	6	7	5	3
Low recognition of these target groups at a public policy level	13	15	13	9	3	5
Limited access to, or skills for using, media/digital media tools, channels or platforms among these target groups	12	18	16	10		2
Low demand or perceived need for media literacy training among professionals working with these target groups	12	12	16	10	5	3
Costs and complexity of meeting additional needs (e.g. linguistic or psycho-social support)	10	17	17	3	1	10
Mistrust of professional help or support among these target groups	6	14	17	6	8	7

Legend: Extremely important, Very important, Moderately important, Slightly importanty, Not at all important, Don't know

Across the research stakeholders highlighted persistent concerns about the prioritisation of and approaches to media literacy. Issues highlighted in relation to the media literacy included the **limited duration of funding, the limited availability of funding for assessing the impact of actions, and the limited availability of funding for pilots and testing of approaches.** This concern was also set in the context of current EU level policy focus on regulation of online media and the conflation and narrowing of media literacy as a digital-skills and online safety topic. For example, recent actions include the significant Digital Services Act has strengthened requirements on Very Large Online Platforms (VLOP) and Very Large Online Seach Engines (VLOSE) to take steps that address mis- and disinformation and harmful content on their platforms.[12] This includes measures to address issues such as cyber violence against women, harms to minors online, specific guidelines in relation to the integrity of elections[13] and an industry-led Code of Practice on Disinformation.[14] Similarly, concerns about generative AI technologies, are also being addressed through the new AI act, that will strengthen regulatory expectations in this area.15 In parallel the European Union's education and skills focus in framed by the EUs industrial strategy for the twin transition16 that is being taken forward through the Digital Education Action Plan (2021–2027)[17], and includes a range of actions on digital literacy and associated digital competency framework (See DigiComp framework below), and the European Commission's Strategy for a Better Internet for Children.[18]

DigiComp framework[19]

› **Information and data literacy:** To articulate information needs, to locate and retrieve digital data, information and content. To judge the relevance of the source and its content. To store, manage, and organise digital data, information and content.

› **Communication and collaboration:** To interact, communicate and collaborate through digital technologies while being aware of cultural and generational diversity. To participate in society through public and private digital services and participatory citizenship. To manage one's digital presence, identity and reputation.

› **Digital content creation:** To create and edit digital content. To improve and integrate information and content into an existing body of knowledge while understanding how copyright and licences are to be applied. To know how to give understandable instructions for a computer system.

› **Safety:** To protect devices, content, personal data and privacy in digital environments. To protect physical and psychological health, and to be aware of digital technologies for social well-being and social inclusion. To be aware of the environmental impact of digital technologies and their use.

› **Problem solving:** To identify needs and problems, and to resolve conceptual problems and problem situations in digital environments. To use digital tools to innovate processes and products. To keep up to date with the digital evolution.

1.4 Taxonomy of policy measures, actors and initiatives

As indicated in the section above, our research points to a changing ML landscape with digitalisation driving a fundamental shift in how media is consumed, as well as the ML skills needed to navigate it. It also signals rising distrust in key media outlets, cautious attitudes towards emerging technology and policy concerns around overall levels of media and digital literacy, as well as civic engagement.

In response to these emerging trends, European and country-level legislative measures and policies, key actors and initiatives are evolving. A taxonomy of the current landscape is provided below, to set the scene for each country case study.

Legislation and policy measures

As media literacy traverses a broad range of policy dimensions such as media education, combating misinformation, digital skills, online safety and privacy rights, national media literacy agendas across Europe are usually operationalised through a multitude of legal acts and strategies. **While our country reports show that approaches to media policy (culture) and education across European countries are highly diverse, European policies in the area of the digital market are increasingly aligning.**

The latter is linked to the EU's strong competences to regulate activities of economic actors in digital markets, with Member States expected to transpose a number of EU measures into national legislation and enforce them. As noted in the context section above, however, when it comes to media policy and education, the EU has only an indirect influence, supporting and supplementing the efforts of Member States and encouraging their cooperation. The EU's competences of different strength and nature, across the different policy areas intersecting in media literacy policy, thus manifest in the convergence of the type and variety of measures that EU Member States have adopted.

With the above context in mind, media literacy efforts observed across the country case studies can be clustered across three regulatory areas (bringing together digital, cultural and educational policy considerations):

1. **Laws regulating the digital market** (specifically for online platforms and search engines). Here, EU-level legal measures heavily influence alignment in the development of national activities through the Digital Services Act (DSA)[20], Digital Markets Act (DMA),[21] the Data Act[22] and most recently the AI Act.[23] National measures identified through the country case studies can be grouped as follows:

a. **Legal obligations imposed on platforms/ search engines relating to online safety and content regulation**. This includes the protection of consumer rights and transparency (privacy and information rights), the regulation of advertising, and the fight against illegal content (e.g the German Network Enforcement Act[24] to improve law enforcement in social networks and the UK Online Safety Act[25]).

b. **Positive obligations imposed on platforms to actively engage in media literacy activities**. Such obligations often regulate platforms' interactions with national media regulators and lay out their responsibility to address pressing media literacy concerns, such as the fight against mis- and disinformation. While such measures are much less prominent than those concerned with online safety and content regulation, such positive obligations are increasingly reflected in Member State regulations, including France's 2018 'Law against the manipulation of information[26] (introducing obligations on online platforms to bring users' attention to information believed to be fake), Spain's 2022 General Audiovisual Communication Law (article 10 on media literacy)[27] and Romania's 2024 (draft) Law on the responsible use of technology in the context of the deepfake phenomenon[28]).

2. **Regulation of traditional mass media** (i.e. broadcasting). Here, EU-level legal measures include the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) which governs EU-wide coordination of national legislation on all audiovisual media, as well as the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) which lays down rules for the functioning of the internal market for media services to safeguard the independence and pluralism of these services.[29] While relying on the implementing measures by Member States, the AVMSD in particular has played a key role in further harmonising political agendas across the EU. National measures in this area can be broken down as follows:

a. **Protection of journalistic/media freedom and media pluralism** typically enshrined in national constitutions (e.g. Article 5 of the German constitution, Article 54 of Poland's Constitution, Romanian Constitution Article 30f) and ratification of international standards;

b. **Regulation of Audiovisual media companies when it comes to content and consumer rights** (e.g. law no.190/2022 providing clarifications regarding the control of access to content in Romania[30] and the Online Safety and Media Regulation Act (OSMR) in Ireland[31]). Here, it is worth noting that a number of the laws described for traditional media also concern online platforms (1.a above), as countries move to adopt legislation that reflects a diversifying media landscape (e.g. Ireland's new online safety act addresses actors ranging from 'Netflix to newspapers'[32]).

c. **Positive obligations imposed on audiovisual companies to contribute to media literacy.** For instance, in France, audio-visual companies (both public and private as of 2020) have been legally required to contribute to media literacy and report about their media literacy initiatives[33].

3. **Education and skills policies.** When it comes to education, EU-level strategies such as the Digital Education Action Plan (DEAP)[34] and Strategy for a Better Internet for Children,[35] are likely to have some bearing on Member States' policy agendas when it comes to (digital) media literacy. Nonetheless, national education policies in the EU around media literacy appear to be less harmonised and clear-cut. This is partially explained by the lack of direct EU-level influence in this area, as well as the tendency for media literacy not to be presented as a standalone policy priority in national education agendas. It is instead typically embedded in wider education strategies around:

a. **Citizenship education.** This is the case, for instance, in France, Germany and Ireland. In France, 'the citizenship pathway' spanning primary and secondary education was introduced in the curriculum in 2015. MIL is a core component of these pathways to citizenship, which aim to *'pass on the values and principles of the French Republic and of life in democratic societies'*.[36]

b. **Digital skills.** A large number of European countries have adopted specific national digital education strategies, particularly following the pandemic and the Commission's DEAP, which include media literacy elements. For instance, actions 14 and 15 of Italy's National Digital School Plan (PNSD) outline a framework for digital competencies and media education.[37] Some countries have also developed specific digital strategies for vocational education and training and lifelong learning which incorporate media literacy elements. For example, the Programme for the Development of Digital Skills in Poland[38] involves the development of digital competences for all citizens to navigate their personal lives (including their interactions with online media messages).

Key actors

At country-level, the landscape of media literacy actors rolling out, monitoring and leveraging the above policy frameworks can be clustered as follows:

Public authorities:

› **Policy bodies,** establishing, administering, and coordinating media literacy priorities through various thematic dimensions, strategies and programmes, including:

– Relevant ministries (particularly for education, culture, children/youth, innovation and digitalisation).

– Dedicated bodies responsible for media literacy (e.g. the Centre pour l'éducation aux médias et à l'information (CLEMI) in France).

– Specific directorates and government agencies with media literacy remits, e.g. the Federal Agency for Civic Education (BPB) in Germany, BPB[39] or the National Institute of Educational Technologies and teacher training in Spain).[40]

› **Regulatory bodies** tasked with enforcing media literacy obligations (e.g. Ofcom in the UK, Arcom in France, Coimisiún na Meán (CnaM) in Ireland and the National Audiovisual Council (NAC) in Romania).

Civil society

› **NGOs and networks,** including organisations that support media literacy education activities, engage and mobilise professional groups, and support a range of observatory and fact-checking activities.

› **Grassroots civil society and voluntary organisations,** including, for example, community, youth or sports groups, that support informal education and community engagement activities.

Education and research organisations

› **Education institutions**, including schools, further education, and higher education institutions.

› **Academics and their networks**, producing activities and research on media literacy/education subjects (For instance, the Media Literacy Education Division of the German Association of Educational Science (DGfE) which assembles educational researchers who focus on questions of media education in research and teaching (made up of 400 academics) and publishes the MedienPädagogik journal[41]).

Technology sector actors

› **Online platforms** (incl. social media) and search engines.

› **EdTech**.

Traditional media organisations

› Public media companies.

› Private media companies.

Other stakeholders

› **Media literacy practitioners** in formal education (e.g. teachers, trainers, community and youth workers).

› **Parents/carers.**

› **Beneficiaries** of media literacy initiatives (e.g. children; students; at-risk groups; general population)

Types of programmes

Lastly, the review of national activities points to the following clusters of media literacy initiatives:

› **National educational initiatives** and large programmes.

› Initiatives that **offer teaching in schools or other educational settings**.

› **Professional development and training initiatives**, including for educators and librarians, and:

› **Targeted outreach and awareness-raising activities**, e.g. resilience to disinformation campaigns or targeted work with at-risk groups to encourage safe internet use.

› Development of **digital product tools and features** (e.g. for information and content moderation).

The nature and role of these policy frameworks, actors and initiatives across Europe is explored in further depth in the subsequent eight country case studies

2.0
Country case studies

2.1 France

Country context

Policy and regulatory context

The policy and regulatory landscape framing media literacy in France is rich and well-established. Media and information literacy (MIL)[42] has special political significance, as it is associated with the fundamental values of the French Republic and citizenship. The responsibility for MIL lies with several public actors, with civil society also playing a prominent role in implementing and shaping MIL practices. This section provides an overview of the main legislation that has shaped the MIL landscape in France, as well as an assessment of the national MIL framework.

Dating as far back as 1986, national audiovisual companies have been legally required to contribute to media literacy.[43] In practice, this obligation expanded to private companies in 2020 when regulatory body Arcom (Autorité de régulation de la communication audiovisuelle et numérique, formerly Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel, CSA) made it mandatory for companies with whom it signs an agreement to report on their MIL actions.[44] In 2018, the 'Law against the manipulation of information' (widely known as the 'anti-fake news law') imposed obligations on online platforms like Google and Meta to promote transparency and invest in the fight against mis- and disinformation, notably during electoral periods.

This law stipulates that online platforms should cooperate with Arcom and engage in MIL activities. In sum, most actors operating in the digital and audiovisual space in France have duties regarding MIL, and Arcom is tasked with enforcing these obligations.

At the European level, France seeks to be at the forefront of EU regulation on online safety and content regulation. The Digital Services Act (DSA) was adopted in August 2023 during France's Presidency of the Council of the European Union[45], placing legal obligations on the main online platforms and search engines relating to the protection of consumer rights and transparency, the regulation of advertising and the fight against illegal content. President Emmanuel Macron followed this with an official communication in November 2023 stating: '*We will work in France towards an exemplary implementation of the principles and provisions planned at the European level*'. This was subsequently actualised in a bill aimed at securing and regulating the digital space (Projet de loi visant à sécuriser et réguler l'espace numérique), referred to as the 'SREN' law.[46] However, the implementation of the DSA into French law was stalled following a detailed opinion from the European Commission[47], which expressed concern that the proposed law overstepped the DSA[48] and may conflict with a pillar of internet law: namely the prohibition of a state to impose generalised surveillance on a service.

In a report commissioned by the Ministry of Economics, Finance and Industrial and Digital Sovereignty, experts welcomed the intensive legislative activity taking place at the EU level, but argued that EU regulation needed clarification and 'stabilisation'[49] as the EU regulatory landscape, including the DSA, the Digital Markets Act (DMA), the Data Act and the AI Act, will impact the organisation and implementation of national regulation. Alongside the need for stronger coordination at national level, the report highlighted the need for to establish authorities to carry out the provisions outlined in these legal acts,[50] and for increased human resources and reinforced technical capacities to regulate areas that were previously outside their scope.[51]

France also has a strong tradition when it comes to teaching MIL in schools. The link between school education and the media emerged in the 1970s, when the Ministry of Education recommended using the press as pedagogical support given the 'realities of the modern world'.[52] The Ministry of Education subsequently established the CLEMI (*Centre pour l'éducation aux médias et à l'information*) in 1983 to oversee the coverage of MIL in the French Education System. Furthermore, a new law in 2006 formally established MIL as part of the common core of skills and knowledge that all pupils must have acquired upon leaving compulsory education.

Laws passed subsequently enshrined MIL's role in fostering values of the French Republic. Specifically, a 2013 school reform law (*Loi du 8 juillet 2013 d'orientation et de programmation pour la refondation de l'école de la République*) emphasised that the ability to critically assess information is crucial to safeguard democracy and transmit citizenship – and was further reinforced after the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris.[53] In response to the wave of disinformation triggered by this event, regulatory bodies Arcom (*Autorité de régulation de la communication audiovisuelle et numérique*) and CNIL (*Commission nationale de l'informatique et des libertés*) strengthened their partnership with CLEMI and engaged in MIL activities. In 2015, 'pathways to citizenship' spanning primary and secondary education were introduced in the curriculum, which aim to *'pass on the values and principles of the French Republic and of life in democratic societies*'[54] and of which MIL is a core component.

Despite MIL discourse being integrated into French societal values, MIL education has faced several obstacles. The resources allocated to MIL were found to be 'insufficient and scattered' in a 2019 report,[55] prompting the Ministry of Culture to adopt an MIL strategy and earmark €3 million of its 2021 budget to support MIL practitioners.

In schools, MIL is treated as a cross-cutting subject and all teachers are encouraged to provide MIL classes, with the support of teacher-librarians. However, this means in practice that MIL is not taught systematically and relies on the goodwill of individual teachers.[56] In addition, policy stakeholders interviewed for this research deemed it essential to better train teachers and MIL practitioners, as teachers have reported that a lack of training is the main reason why they spend on average only three hours per term on MIL activities.[57]

Policy stakeholders have also highlighted the lack of a structured network of MIL practitioners. Whilst there are several existing MIL initiatives, MIL actors are generally not aware of each other's work. Moreover, MIL initiatives and resources are unequally distributed across the territory. The Île-de-France region, for instance, has the highest concentration of MIL actors and thus the largest offer of MIL initiatives.[58]

In response to the challenges outlined above, a 2022 circular (*Généralisation de l'éducation aux médias et à l'information*) highlighted the need to standardise MIL teaching in schools. In secondary education, MIL is now part of a compulsory course on 'Digital sciences and technology'[59]. To support these standardisation efforts, the Ministry of Education also published a handbook to support teachers with MIL education[60].

Importantly, a report from Arcom noted that the French MIL framework is mainly focused on pupils in formal education at the risk of overlooking other relevant target groups, and recommended that media organisations involved in MIL activities address groups other than young people.[61] Nonetheless, the fact that the Ministry of Culture is involved in MIL policy alongside the Ministry of Education ensures that other targets groups (e.g., older citizens and young people outside formal education) are catered for to a certain extent.[62]

The current state of media literacy

According to the Open Society Institute's Media Literacy Index, France is ranked 17th out of 47 countries in terms of its 'potential for resilience towards mis/disinformation'.[63] This index is based on indicators of media freedom, trust and education. Like most of its neighbours (e.g., Belgium, Germany, Spain), France belongs to the second-best performing cluster of countries.

French people most frequently consume news through television, either via dedicated programmes or continuous news channels.[64] Social media are the third most-frequently used source of information, with 70% of people surveyed in a Kantar Public study declaring to use them frequently.[65] According to the 2023 Reuters Institute Digital News Report, Facebook is the leading news source among social media platforms[66]. French people also rely on the radio for news: 32% of the people surveyed in the Kantar Public study declared listening to the radio every day to stay informed on current events[67]. According to the Reuters Institute, this reliance on the radio is an 'unusual feature of the French market'.[68]

France is characterised by particularly low levels of trust in the media. A 2019 study by the Pew Research Center found that only 28% of respondents believed the news media to be very important to the functioning of society[69] – the lowest share of the eight countries surveyed (DE, NL, SE, DK, UK, ES, IT, FR). Furthermore, low levels of trust in the media coincide with relatively low levels of trust in politics. For example, whilst 54% of Polish people surveyed by OpinionWay for SciencesPo declared they trusted politics, this share was only 30% in France[70] – once again the lowest share among the four countries surveyed (FR, DE, PL, IT). Similarly, France has the lowest percentage of people (31%) who believe that democracy is well-functioning in their country.[71]

As regards trust in social media, 68% of the people surveyed declared that they do not trust them to keep informed about current affairs, despite their widespread use.[72] Almost half of the people surveyed declared being confronted with fake news on social media several times a week.[73]

The digital skills of the French population are above the EU average. Indeed, as reported in the 2022 European Commission DESI index, 62% of people have at least basic digital skills (compared to 54% on average in the EU). Similarly, 31% of people have above basic digital skills (compared to 26% on average in the EU).[74] Yet despite relatively high levels of digital skills and scepticism of news found on social media, research suggests that adults are still at risk of mis-/disinformation. A study by Le Monde's fact-checking arm Les Décodeurs highlighted that the population who most frequently consulted 'dubious' news websites was between 35-49 years old[75]. Interestingly, the study revealed that citizens from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were not more prone to mis- and/or disinformation compared to the general population, with almost equal shares of citizens from higher versus lower socioeconomic backgrounds being found to consult 'dubious news websites' (31,4% versus 33,4%).[76] However, young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods are considered more at-risk when it comes to mis- or disinformaton, which is why some MIL initiatives have targeted this group specifically.[77]

As mentioned earlier, there has been a shift in the French MIL landscape since the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris. The targeting of the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo had placed freedom of expression at the centre of public debate, while the attacks saw a spread of disinformation and conspiracy theories, which prompted stronger policy responses to increase MIL and frame it as a central tool to teach pupils about values of the French Republic.[78] Policy stakeholders have argued that disinformation about the Israel-Palestine conflict is a major risk in the French context, given that France is home to the largest Arab and Jewish communities in Europe.[79]

Wider landscape of media literacy initiatives

France has a very active MIL scene, with a wealth of initiatives delivered by various actors[80] and with MIL policy overseen by the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education.

The Ministry of Culture supports MIL initiatives through its General Delegation for Transmission, Territories, and Cultural Democracy (*Délégation générale à la transmission, aux territoires et à la démocratie Culturelle*), providing funding to MIL projects and working with grassroots organisations such as *'Fédérations d'éducation populaire'* (community education organisations providing non-formal education).[81] A flagship initiative of the Ministry of Culture is the 'journalists' residencies' program, whereby professional journalists are hosted in a specific territory to foster dialogue with the local population.[82]

Furthermore, the Ministry of Culture frames public libraries as a vehicle for advancing MIL due to their position in the local community,[83] their experience forming partnerships with local education and information stakeholders,[84] and their (usual) lack of an entry fee, which allows them to support equal access to the media and quality information.[85] The Ministry of Culture provides resources to encourage public libraries' MIL activities,[86] such as workshops, debates, conferences and in-school interventions.

The Ministry of Education is also a central figure in the French MIL landscape as it steers MIL education in schools, mainly through CLEMI and Eduscol (an online platform providing resources, support, and information for teachers and other education professionals). As the 'epicentre' of MIL in France[87], the CLEMI is a hub for MIL resources in France and frequently collaborates with other institutions. For example, it partnered with SciencesPo university, the AFP and XWiki SAS to create anti-disinformation project DE FACTO. Furthermore, the CLEMI has organised the 'Week of the Press and Media in Schools' (*Semaine de la presse et des médias dans l'école*) every year since 1989, during which schools across France engage in discussions, workshops, and projects focused on media literacy, journalism, and the role of the press in society. The Week is both the 'most well-known' MIL initiative in France and the largest in terms of participants.[88]

The CLEMI also works with regulatory body Arcom, which both enforces other actors' MIL obligations and engages in MIL activities itself, such as providing resources and information on MIL and delivering trainings for teachers and journalism students.[89] Furthermore, the Arcom reports yearly on the MIL activities put in place by online platforms and private and national audiovisual companies, who are also active in the field of MIL. During the Week of the Press and Media in Schools, TV channels and radio stations welcome pupils on their premises to introduce them to journalism[90]. Audiovisual companies also developed specific MIL activities, including longer-term initiatives like Radio France's *InterClass'*.[91]

Finally, civil society is actively involved in promoting MIL. There are numerous organisations dedicated to MIL activities, most often originating from journalists' associations or MIL scholars. A few of these have become reference organisations; *Savoir Devenir,* for instance, delivers training for some staff of the Ministry of Culture.[92] Furthermore, initiatives from civil society organisations sometimes allow for a wider range of MIL needs to be addressed. For example, *Entre les lignes* organises MIL workshops for young people outside formal education and/or under judicial supervision.[93]

Would you like to learn more about specific initiatives on the ground?

For a closer look at a set of French media literacy initiatives with potential for transferrable learning, check out the options below:

Initiative 1: The Disinformation Objective (Objectif Désinfox) *– a large-scale French anti-disinformation campaign*

Initiative 2: Silly Conspiracies (Les Complots Rigolos) *– training modules aimed at developing pupils' critical thinking skills*

Initiative 3: Lights on the news (Lumières sur l'Info) *– engaging journalists to deliver media literacy workshops inside and outside the classroom for youthin disadvantaged areas*

Looking ahead

Future challenges and opportunities

The development of AI-powered disinformation is widely recognised as a threat that will likely amplify the spread, and credibility, of false content. In light of this risk, stakeholders in France have reaffirmed the importance of MIL and it is expected to gain even more significance in the coming years. As reported by a MIL initiative coordinator, although generative AI is relatively new, the need for critical thinking is timeless.

The landscape around generative AI in France is still being shaped. Due to the government's proactive initiatives to become a tech leader, France is considered as an attractive environment for investments into cutting-edge technology.[94] This is why Google inaugurated a hub for AI in Paris with 300 staff across different teams,[95] which aims to foster partnerships with French startups and research institutions like the *Institut Curie* or the *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* (CNRS).[96]

Actors like the AFP are at the forefront of the fight against disinformation. The AFP's fact-checking department, AFP Factuel, is a global reference for the latest developments in news verification. It boasts an extensive network of over 100 journalists across the world who can fact-check information in 26 different languages.[97] As evidenced during the *Objectif Désinfox* project, the AFP uses the latest techniques to verify information and has even co-developed a software extension called 'InVID/WeVerify' to analyse videos.[98]

Through its Jigsaw unit, Google is developing cutting-edge technologies to fight disinformation and reduce toxicity online. For example, its tools Perspective API and Tune have been adapted for the French language and have been used to moderate French news publisher *Le Monde's* comments section.[99]

2.2 Germany

Country context

Policy and regulatory context

State media authorities in Germany actively promote media literacy to enable children, teenagers and adults to take advantage of the benefits that media can provide.[100] Imparting media literacy is one of their primary remits and a key component of this teaching is risk avoidance. This results in a contribution to preventative youth media protection, development of democratic literacy, and consumer and use protection.

For 20 years, the German authorities have been initiating and running projects that promote media education and responsible use of media. They run three large-scale joint projects (**FLIMMO**,[101] **Internet ABC**[102] and **Klicksafe**[103]) in addition to many national and local media literacy projects.

Germany has the biggest newspaper market in Europe (and the fifth biggest in the world). In 2023, there were 320 regionally-distributed daily newspapers, 16 weekly newspapers and 1,300 magazines.[104] Public broadcasters have a legal mandate to reach as many people as possible with information, education, advice and entertainment (based on the UK model of fee-financed cooperations). This principle has remained unchanged since the founding of the Federal Republic in 1949[105], however digitalisation has changed the media offer in Germany – in 2021 there were 260 publications, of which 2.2 million were e-distributed every day.

It has also changed how media is consumed: 78 million people in Germany (93%) were regularly online in the first quarter of 2022 and 73 million are active on social media. Furthermore, everyone can now participate in public discourse and share opinions through social media and blogs.[106]

Press freedom is **guaranteed under Article 5 of the German constitution**. However, Germany's press freedom ranking fell to 21 in 2023 (from 16th in 2021) due to attacks on media and journalists in demonstrations.[107] There were 103 recorded attacks on journalists in Germany in 2022,[108] and it has been claimed that such attacks are rarely prosecuted by police and law officers. A particularly prominent movement that has been involved in such attacks is the *Querdenken* (lateral thinking) movement, which is a conspiracy theory movement against COVID-19, fuelled by antisemitic tropes, that organised anti-lockdown rallies in 2020. As such, the work of the media associations ***Correktiv*** and the **German Press Agency DPA** in combatting mis/disinformation in Germany is very important.

Overall, German approaches to media literacy education are concerned with how the variety of media can be used in a meaningful way for learning and teaching. The government put a general digital strategy into place in 2022.[109] There are many specific initiatives that work towards improving digital education and skills in Germany. The **Digital Education Initiative (2020)[110]** aims to improve digital learning and strengthen knowledge about digitisation among people of all ages and all educational backgrounds. Further, *Berufsbildung* **(Vocational Training) 4.0[111]** includes programmes such as Digital Media in Vocational Education, which promotes the modernisation and strengthening of vocational training through innovative, digitally supported education, communication and information solutions to support learning and working in the digital society. The training programme also prioritises strengthening media competence of employees and organisations, to enable them to make optimal use of digital media-based learning. In addition to the target group of learners, the focus is also on educational specialists. Nationwide, at least 1,200 trainers have been trained in a company context.

Further, the *DigitalPakt Schule* **(School Digital Pact)[112]** emphasises the need to invest in the establishment of Wi-Fi and digital networking in school premises. It also informs federal state governments to invest in digital infrastructure and display and interaction devices (e.g., interactive whiteboards, displays and associated control devices) for use in schools and school-related mobile devices (laptops, notebooks and tablets).

Online harms and internet safety

An important component of media literacy work is reducing the spread of false and potentially harmful information by educating citizens to recognise dangerous information online. In Germany, the **NetzDG law** (the network enforcement act, also known colloquially as the 'Facebook Act') obliges social media platforms with over 2 million users to remove 'clearly illegal' content within 24 hours and all illegal content within 7 days of it being posted, or face a maximum fine of €50 million. The law was passed in 2017 and took full effect in 2018. However, this will be repealed once the EU Digital Services Act becomes applicable in Germany, expected imminently at the time of writing[113].

In terms of child safety, the **Child Protection on the Internet alliance[114]**, made up of 17 NGOs for child rights and child protection organisations, calls for more child safety online against a backdrop of continually-rising online child sexual abuse and exploitation in Germany. The proposed law on protection against digital violence (presented in 2023)[115] aims to address digital violence and anonymous hate speech, and looks to block user accounts and force platform operators to disclose IP addresses.

Furthermore, **HateAid** is a non-profit organisation that helps those who are affected by online hate speech in Germany. This organisation was funded by the state with €600,000 a year from 2020 to 2022. The funding was extended in 2023, but according to government information it will no longer be available from 2024. Further funds could be made available at the request of the Parliament but it is unlikely.[116]

Privacy and information rights

The **German Privacy Act (***Bundesdatenschutz-gesetz***)** was introduced in 2018 (alongside EU GDPR rules). It ensures the protection of personal data whether processed by advanced technology or more traditional methods, and covers any personal data intended to be stored. This law applies to non-public bodies if:

1. The processing of personal data takes place in Germany;

2. Such data-processing activities are traceable to the German branch of an international organisation as either a controller or a processor, and;

3. Such a controller or processor does not have an establishment in the EEA (European Economic Area countries: Norway, Lichtenstein, and Iceland), but the processing falls within the scope of the GDPR.[117]

Germany has 17 different Data Protection Authorities (DPAs). One of these applies federally with jurisdiction over postal companies and telecommunication organisations. The other 16 preside over private organisations operating in their jurisdiction. This large number of DPAs posed challenges for ensuring compliance. However, there is a 'one-stop' mechanism for companies with offices in multiple federal states, making it easier to keep up with the rules and regulations of each DPA. The promotion of good practices in data protection helps with media literacy work by ensuring the safe and legal use of online media and platforms.

Democratic engagement, citizenship and education

The 16th report on the topic of 'Promoting democratic education in children and youth'[118] describes the increasing challenges for democracy and political education and provides a broad and systematic overview of the social spaces in which young people experience political education. The report emphasises the orientation of young people towards democratic values and the development of critical judgment to be the primary goal of political education, and calls for a clear commitment from politicians to political education on democracy and human rights.

There are a number of strategies to promote youth engagement. For example, **Germany's Youth Strategy**[119] calls for young people's involvement in democracy and a strengthening of their democratic awareness in order to equip them with the skills they need for democratic participation and social solidarity, as well as to combat anti-democratic tendencies. The **2016 federal strategy on preventing extremism and promoting democracy (*Strategie zur Extremismusprävention und Demokratieförderung*)**[120] focuses on civic education, intercultural education, democracy and civil society engagement, with the goal to expand packages of measures and develop new ideas. This includes a programme by the Federal Ministry of the Interior (*Bundesministerium des Inneren, BMI*) called 'Social cohesion through participation' (*Zusammenhalt durch Teilhabe*).[121] In place since 2010, this programme funds projects to strengthen democratic participation and combat extremism. The focus is on regional clubs, associations and educators.

Furthermore, the **Federal Agency for Civic Education (*Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*, BPB)**[122] lobbies for better understanding of political matters, a keener awareness of democracy, and a greater willingness to participate in political processes. It works with the state, policymakers, educational institutions, academia and the media, and is active in the areas of non-curricular citizenship education for young people and adults as well as citizenship education in schools. It offers citizenship education services in the following areas:

> Conferences, seminars, forums, congresses and study trips;

> Publications;

> Teaching aids and learning resources on citizenship education;

> Development of new methods and use of new techniques to spread information;

> Exhibitions and competitions such as the citizenship education competition for pupils **(*Schülerwettbewerb zur politischen Bildung*);**[123]

> Set-up and coordination of a citizenship education network (*Netzwerk der politischen Bildung*);

> Support and funding for pluralist education services.

There are also examples of initiatives that focus on promoting democracy. For example, ***Demokratie leben!***[124] is a government-funded project that has been promoting democracy through around 600 projects since 2015, targeted towards people of all ages in society. The programme focuses on 'places of prevention', e.g. in families, educational institutions, among peers, during recreational activities, on the internet or in the penal system. Further, **Experience Democracy (*DemokratieErleben*)**[125] encourages young people to actively take control of their reality, offers them a wide range of opportunities for participation, and helps them to take charge of decisions that affect them. The initiative aims to:

> Give children and young people the skills they need to responsibly participate in shaping their lives;

> Strengthen democracy education and child and youth participation as a task of civil society;

> Integrate best practices into democracy education and make them available to all;

> Improve visibility and political efficacy through networking, dialogue and interaction between civil society and the state.

Almost half of the people living in Germany are fairly or very satisfied with the state of democracy in their country, according to a new report by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation published in April 2023.[126] Compared to the first survey carried out in 2019, there has even been a 'very slight increase' in trust, rising from 46.6% to 48.7%. However, the survey shows that scepticism about democracy is greatest among people of a low level of education and low income and among those living in eastern Germany. This population is also at risk of consuming untrustworthy media that may use disinformation to enhance feelings of scepticism about current democratic procedures. Media literacy is thus an important skill for citizens to better understand the reliability of the media sources they consume.

The current state of media literacy

According to the Open Society Institute New Media Literacy Index 2023,[127] Germany ranked 11 out of 35 countries with a media literacy score of 61 (out of a 100). Finland scored highest with 74.

The figure below shows the media consumption practices in Germany in 2023, with TV accounting for the highest number of minutes per day by far.[128]

Figure 5: German media consumption overview (2023)
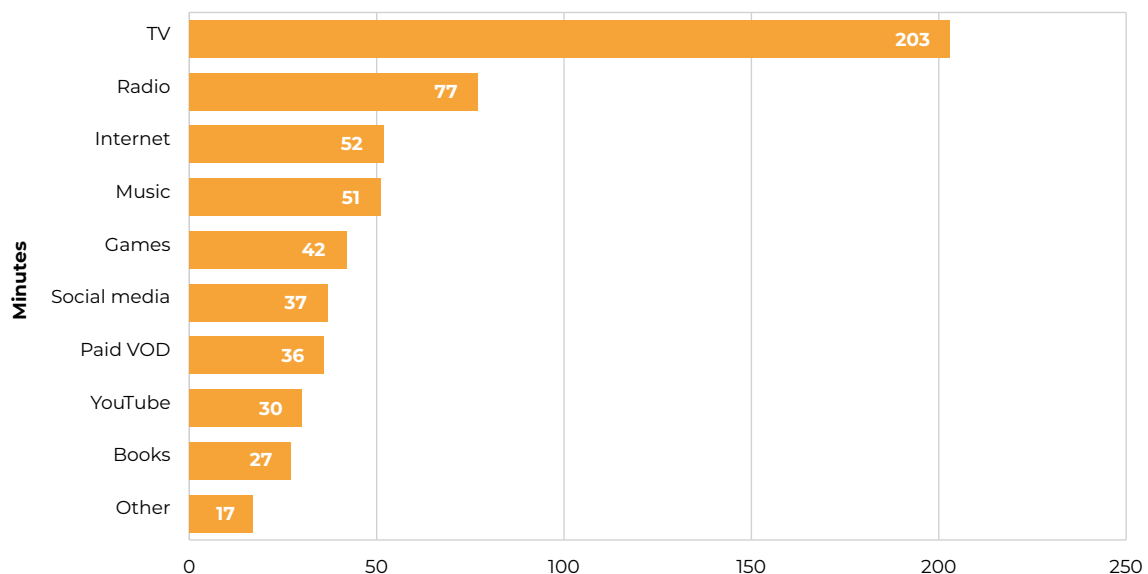
Source: own elaboration based on Statista 2023

The figure above illustrates the continued significance of TV and radio within Germany's media landscape, a finding further corroborated by interview responses. One interviewee attributed this trend to the demographic makeup of German society, which skews towards an ageing population. While newspapers remain a crucial medium, the feasibility of providing printed formats in specific regions may be compromised; in rural areas, for instance, older citizens might no longer have access to daily newspapers either due to logistical challenges arising from their lack of profitability or because they are financially unable to afford them on their modest pensions (prices can be around 50 EUR per month). Stakeholders highlighted concerns that this situation may be exploited by groups who distribute free newspapers without sound journalistic work, fostering fear and eroding trust in traditional media.[129]

In Germany, efforts to enhance media literacy are widespread, with a particular emphasis on combatting hate speech as well as disinformation. However, because the competence for media literacy lies with regional media authorities (media regulators, *Medienanstalten*), there is some criticism that it results in a patchwork of approaches (e.g. various intensity, various focal points). There is also criticism that media literacy is considered a state matter because it is assigned to a regulator.[130] Similarly, the incorporation of media literacy promotion into school curricula is subject to voluntary adoption, leading to federal disparities despite its importance nationwide.

From a focus on media literacy education in schools, to a shift to digital literacy in the wake of recent geopolitical developments, to the prevention and handling of misinformation, the policy discussions on media literacy have varied over time. An interviewee representing Google emphasised that while the importance of media literacy is widely recognised by policymakers, stakeholders, and society at large, there is no consensus on an approach for the future. There may be a tendency to promote media literacy as a substitute for identifying and responding to misinformation, at the expense of other aspects of media literacy such as active participation through creative content production.[131]

In terms of digital skills, the average computer and information competencies of German eighth graders are middling in international comparison. One third have reached only the bottom two skills levels: these students can do little more than click on a link and copy and paste content from one place to another. This means they do not have the necessary skills to participate successfully in an increasingly digitalised society.[132]

Awareness of mis/disinformation

Students in Germany, alongside those in Denmark, Ireland, Japan, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, scored highest in the PISA 2018 index[133] of reading strategies for assessing the credibility of sources. The results for Germany also indicate that there is a considerable gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students in mastering effective reading strategies. Germany showed the fourth largest socio-economic gap across all participating countries and economies in the same index (PISA 2018), after Switzerland, Luxembourg, and the United States.

Knowledge of effective reading strategies may play a crucial role in addressing these inequities. When comparing students with similar socio-economic status, those who have better knowledge of effective reading strategies are more likely to be proficient readers,[134] this is valid both for boys and girls. In that sense, being equipped with effective reading strategies is an important mediator in the relationship between student backgrounds (e.g. socio-economic status and gender) and reading performance.

An interviewee representing a media authority emphasised the importance of ensuring that students from both rural and urban areas, as well as those from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, are actively involved in media literacy activities. They suggested that one effective approach would be to integrate these activities into school curricula and provide comprehensive training in media literacy for all teachers. Covering the entire spectrum of education, from early childhood education to continuing education and professional development, is crucial.

While children, parents, and teachers are relatively more accessible for media literacy initiatives, engaging adults who are not directly targeted and may lack the time or interest to enhance their media literacy skills presents a major challenge. Similarly, older citizens, who may harbour scepticism towards digital devices due to privacy concerns and Germany's history, can be difficult to involve. Nonetheless, the interviewee underscored the importance of targeting media literacy efforts at all demographic groups.[135]

Other relevant indicators

The figure below sets out the opportunity for German students to learn digital literacy skills at school, against the OECD average. The figures for Germany are lower than the EU average in all areas, which shows that German students are potentially more at risk of lower digital literacy than the OECD average.

Enablers/risks

The Heinrich Böll Foundation carried out recent research on digital literacy in Germany,[136] investigating the factors that have contributed to the widening digital literacy gap in Germany. The switch to online learning in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, was found to enhance digital inequalities due to significant variations in access to digital tools and the internet at home. Several additional social factors were found to significantly affect digital inclusion, including attitudes towards digital media, the frequency and duration of digital media usage, and digital skills and competencies.

In order to bolster digital and media literacy, some of the federal states have organised media literacy days or weeks.[137] There are also a number of media-orientated organisations producing activities and research on media education. These include:

> The **Media Literacy Education Division**[138] of the **German Association of Educational Science (DGfE)** assembles educational researchers who focus on questions of media education in research and teaching (made up of 400 academics). Also publishes the MedienPädagogik journal.

> The **Association for Media Education and Communication Culture (GMK)**[139] is a German professional association for education, culture and media which aims to advance media education and competency from pre-school education to adulthood

> The **Institute for Media Research and Media Education,**[140] which investigates how younger generations deal with media through research and practical experience

> The **Society for Media in Science**[141] researches the sensible usage of media in teaching and learning and provides a critical reflection on the potential of new media in all developing fields in higher education.

Figure 6: Opportunity to learn digital literacy skills in school (Germany/OECD average)
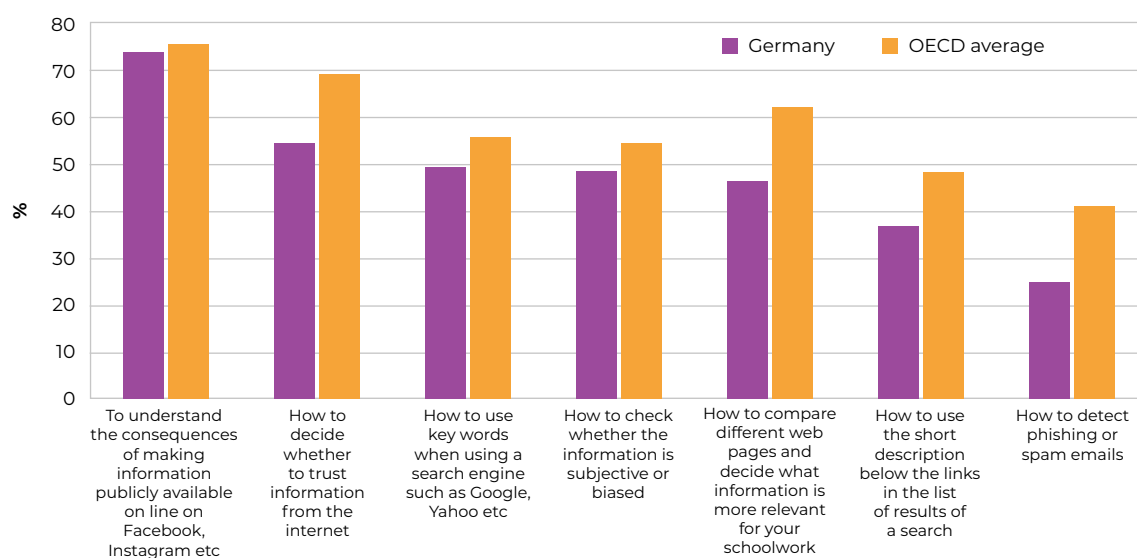
Activities are ranked in descending order of the percentage of students in Germany.

Source: OECD, PISA 2018 Database, Table B.2.6.

Finally, a manifesto was published in 2009 to promote media education: ***Keine Bildung ohne Medien!***[142] (No Education without Media). This has developed into an active platform that is in dialogue with public figures and policy working for the implementation of their recommendations. Their focus topic for 2023 was 'AI and education' and the topic for 2024 is 'exposing disinformation, or why media education'.

Wider landscape of media literacy initiatives

The wider landscape of media literacy initiatives includes a wide range of stakeholders, such as federal states and ministries,[143] federal agencies[144] and different associations.[145]

State media authorities offer a wide variety of training courses on media education and media literacy. As mentioned under section 1.1. The German authorities run, in addition to many national and local media literacy projects, the following large scale joint projects:[146]

> **FLIMMO**[147] is a parental guide for TV, streaming, YouTube, and cinema. Its aim is to help parents navigate the abundance of content available and make age-appropriate selections, by using a traffic light system to indicate the suitability of a film, series or YouTube channel based on pedagogical assessments.

> **Internet ABC**[148] is a media literacy initiative which helps children, parents, and teachers develop a better understanding of the opportunities and challenges of the internet.

> **Klicksafe**[149] is European initiative promoting internet safety and media literacy. It provides resources for children, parents, teachers, and influencers to enhance internet skills and ensure secure online behaviour.

A recent report provides an overview of the media literacy landscape and initiatives at regional and local level.[150] For example, the project ***Echt Fake, ich schwör* (Super fake, I swear)** by the Baden-Württemberg media authority raises awareness of fake news. Teenagers create conspiracy stories themselves in articles, audio contributions, or photos with the guidance of media educators, to understand (deep) fakes and manipulations and learn to recognise them.[151] There are also media literacy initiatives targeted at older people and specifically designed for them.[152] However, in general, there appear to be fewer media literacy programmes and projects for older people and migrants in particular, despite these two groups being more at risk of succumbing to disinformation.[153]

Would you like to learn more about specific initiatives on the ground?

For a closer look at a set of German media literacy initiatives with potential for transferrable learning, check out the options below:

Initiative 1: UseTheNews – *a multifaceted public/private partnership bridging the gap between journalism, education policy and science*

Initiative 2: Pre-bunking campaign – *improving viewers' resilience to online manipulation tactics*

Initiative 3: Teen fact-checking network – *training teens to be professional fact-checkers*

Looking ahead

Future challenges and opportunities

The advent of digitalisation has created a **fundamental shift in how media is consumed in Germany**. Greater numbers of people now tend to consume their media online rather than in paper format and anyone and everyone can now participate in public discourse and share opinions through social media and forms of online media such as blogs and chat forums. Indeed, the increase in usage of social media presents an **added risk of exposure to disinformation** with 'lifestyle influencers' on platforms such as TikTok conflating opinion with politics, leaving consumers unsure of what is fact or not. Nevertheless, our research highlighted the continued significance of TV and radio within Germany's media landscape, although daily newspapers in rural areas may be under threat of exploitation by groups that distribute free newspapers without sound journalistic work, thus fostering fear and eroding trust in traditional media.

Although press freedom is constitutionally guaranteed, a clear challenge Germany faces at present is the increase in incidences of extremist and conspiracy theorist groups making **attacks on journalists and spreading misinformation**. Nonetheless, given the elections taking place in many of Germany's Bundesländer in 2024 and a general increase in distrust of the political system, there is a real risk that the far right may make significant advances.

Research shows that **scepticism about democracy is greatest among people that have a low level of education and low income, as well as among those living in eastern Germany**. This indicates that there are still social legacies from the former division of eastern and western Germany, over 30 years since unification. In fact, 'low information orientated' people represent around one-third of consumers in Germany, meaning this group of people does not consume any form of 'news' and furthermore has little concept of the importance of credible sources. The 2024 campaign titled Year of the News, organised by #UseTheNews, seeks to engage this group and provide recommendations on how to develop MLIs relevant to their needs.

There is thus a wider **need for media literacy to become more embedded into Germany policy frameworks and legislation** in order to systematically tackle misinformation strategies and news trustworthiness. Some Bundesländer have adopted their own media literacy strategies within their education systems (a regional competency in Germany), which is a positive step. Furthermore, media literacy is clearly a topic of interest in Germany at present and media associations in Germany are currently in talks with policymakers about integrating media literacy further into Germany's educational and journalistic landscape.

While Germany already has a lot of MLIs in place, funded nationally by the EU or by companies like Google, there is still a perception among the journalism and fact-checking community that it remains **challenging to obtain sufficient funding** to create and implement projects tackling misinformation. It would therefore be important to stakeholders in Germany to have more funding available to effectively tackle the problem of disinformation, as **many scientific institutions are working on media literacy and tackling disinformation** in Germany, showing that the impetus and interest is there.

2.3 Ireland

Country context

Widely recognised as a European technology hub, Ireland is well-placed to take a leading role in advancing European media literacy objectives in the digital age. The country houses the European headquarters of 13 of the EU's 19 largest platforms,[154] putting Irish authorities at the front line of adopting and enforcing European tech policy.

Ireland also belongs to the cluster of countries with the highest media literacy levels in Europe, reflected by its 6th place ranking in the 2023 European Media Literacy Index.[155] Trust in the media is high, and the Irish media sector is widely recognised for its crucial role in informing, educating, and giving voice to a range of views and opinions.[156]

With the financial crisis of 2008-2009[157] still in memory, there is a public awareness of the need for regulations to protect vulnerable consumers and ensure a fair marketplace.[158] One of the features of online media consumption that makes consumer protection a particularly pressing priority to Irish policymakers is that, unlike traditional publishing, *''the internet and social media is a two-way system in which customers and consumers surrender the most intimate details of their lives to the providers''.*[159] With this in mind, Irish legislators closely monitor technological advancements, shifting consumer behaviours, and evolving social needs.[160]

In line with its ambition to enforce online safety, particularly for children, Ireland has established a robust regulatory framework.[161] The **Online Safety and Media Regulation Act** (OSMR) was launched as a landmark legislation at the end of 2022, making substantial amendments both in Ireland and elsewhere to how users consume, contribute to, and complain about a vast range of media – from streaming services to newspapers, and from TV to online reels.[162] It also provided the legal basis for dissolving the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI), paving the way for the establishment of **Coimisiún na Meán (CnaM)**, an authority responsible for overseeing the national and European regulation on broadcasting, on-demand audiovisual media services and video-sharing platform services.[163]

Looking ahead, Ireland is well-positioned to drive European sectoral collaborations with industry and civil society while providing valuable transferable policy lessons related to the development and regulation of a diverse, safe, and thriving media landscape in the European context.

Policy and regulatory context

The regulatory landscape for media literacy in Ireland provides a complex picture. There are a number of public authorities responsible for directly and indirectly regulating media literacy policy, at both EU and national levels, which are responsible for various intersecting policy areas including education, internet safety, privacy and tackling mis/disinformation.

This section provides an overview of the leading policy and regulatory actors in Irish media literacy, as well as the key legislation and policies they are responsible for enforcing. Subsequently, a brief assessment of the strength of the overall national ML framework is presented.

In Ireland, the most important regulating body for media literacy, safety and plurality is the new media commission **Coimisiún na Meán (CnaM)**. CnAM will continue the commitments held by its predecessor, BAI, as laid down in the amended **Broadcasting Act of 2009**, which mandates the authority to *'encourage research, promote or endorse educational and training initiatives and activities, including in media literacy....'*[164] A key policy approach that was inherited from BAI and is still promoted today is the Media Literacy Policy[165] from 2016. One of the few of its kind across Europe, this policy provides a unified approach to media literacy, detailing a set of competencies essential for navigating current and emerging technological, media and social environments.[166] There are ongoing discussions within CnaM to further advance this policy by introducing an evaluation framework, inspired by a recent toolkit by Ofcom in the UK,[167] to enhance the assessment of ML initiatives and gather more evidence in this field.[168]

CnAM will also be responsible for rolling out the **Online Safety and Media Regulation Act (OSMR)**. The ongoing legislative effort aims to promote safety and compliance within the digital realm and align traditional broadcasting services with audiovisual on-demand media services. Central to this Act is the introduction of binding online safety codes that impose detailed obligations on video-sharing platform services, with a focus on minimising the circulation of harmful content. Non-binding online safety guidance materials and advisory notes will also be provided, including labelling of 'awful but lawful' content. While the Bill already lists a broad spectrum of harms, CnAM will be able to propose new categories of harmful online content to the Government (see more in Spotlight 1).[169],[170]

Spotlight 1 – Five take-aways from the Online Safety and Media Regulations Act (OSMR)

1. **For the first time, Irish legislation will extend to on-demand media services and regulate video-sharing platforms**, including services like YouTube.

2. **Audiovisual on-demand media service providers will be required to register their services and comply with binding media codes and rules.** For online services outside of Irish jurisdiction, CnaM will be entitled to conclude voluntary arrangements with these providers to comply with the Codes.

3. **Binding media codes under Irish criminal law will target criminalised content**, requiring online providers to remove content such as cyberbullying, online humiliation, promotion of self-harm (e.g. eating disorders), and 'flashing,' a new offence referring to the sharing of unsolicited explicit pictures.

4. **A new individual complaints mechanism will be introduced**, initially focusing on issues concerning children such as cyberbullying, and to be implemented in phases by CnAM. Costs of the mechanisms have been proposed to be recovered through levies imposed on designated online service providers.

5. **Breaches of OSMR** may be accompanied by imposed measures and/or heavy fines. CnaM will wield extensive investigative and enforcement powers, enabling actions such as the removal of on-demand media services, blocking access to online services, or imposing financial penalties of up to EUR 20 million or 10% of turnover for non-compliance. This can be compared to DSA, which allows for fines of up to 6% of annual worldwide turnover, or alternatively, periodic penalty payments of up to 5% of average daily worldwide turnover. For a further comparison between DSA and OSMR, please see Annex.

By passing the **Digital Services Bill**[171] in December 2023, the Irish government formally designated CnAM to be the **Digital Services Coordinator for Ireland**, providing CnaM with the necessary supervisory and enforcement powers to apply both the OSMR and the **Digital Services Act (DSA).**[172] Having entered into force on February 17, 2024, this European legislation introduces the user choice to switch off personalised recommender systems that are based on 'profiling'. It will also require very large online platforms (VLOPs) to carry out risk assessment exercises regularly in order to examine risks, such as how illegal content might be disseminated through their services.[173] While the DSA aims to standardise regulations across Europe, national legislation will remain an important tool in regulating digital services. For example, the **Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020**[174] (see more under *an Garda Síochána* below) in Ireland prohibits sharing intimate images without consent, which platforms must comply with, even if not explicitly addressed in the EU DSA.

Of particular relevance to media literacy, CnAM is also tasked with overseeing the transposition and adoption of the **Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD).** This Directive requires the promotion and support of media literacy,[175] while requiring national authorities to i) ensure that Video Sharing Providers (VSPs) take appropriate measures to protect young people from potentially harmful content (which may impair their physical, mental or moral development) and to ii) protect the general public from incitement to violence or hatred and illegal content (such as public provocation to commit terrorist offences, child sexual exploitation and abuse, and racism or xenophobia).[176] To ensure alignment with the AVMSD, an amendment of the Broadcasting Act 2009 occurred in 2019, and was subsequently revised and consolidated by the OSMR in December 2022.[177]

Figure 1 below illustrates the main legislations at the national and European levels in Ireland, demonstrating how the OSMR Act is broader than the AVMSD and how the EU DSA overlaps with both. It is worth noting here that Ireland has chosen to extend its regulations *beyond* the AVMSD, which serves as a minimum harmonisation measure, indicating the baseline for regulatory standards. In cases of conflict, European laws will take precedence over national ones.

Figure 7: Overlap between EU Digital Services Act and Irish Online Safety and Media Regulations Act 2022

Broadcasting Act as amended by the OSMR Act

AVMSD

DSA
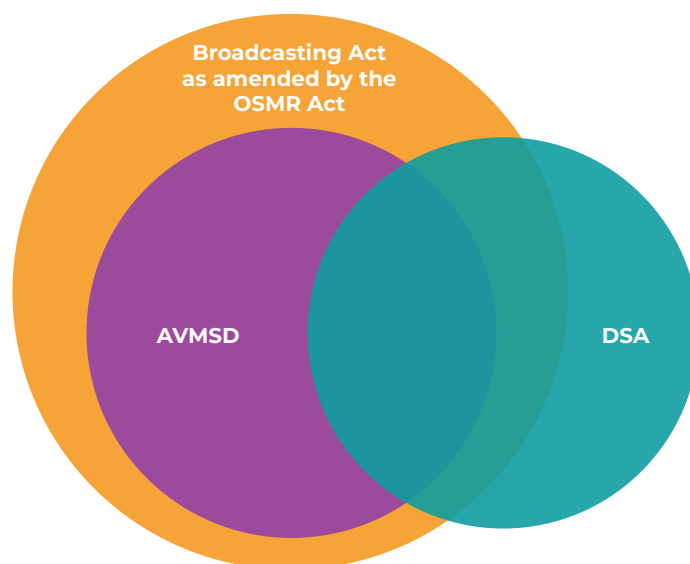
Working alongside CnAM, there are a number of other important regulatory and policymaking bodies, reflecting the multidimensional nature of media literacy:

› **The Department for Education** plays a central role in embedding media literacy skills into the curriculum to equip the next generation. Even within the department, it can be challenging to determine where media literacy fits as there are various divisions responsible for different aspects, such as teacher training and curriculum development. A central policy is the **Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027**,[178] which integrates digital technology across the curriculum in schools, providing a vision where media and digital literacy skills of students are developed in tandem as students use technology for research and presentation purposes.

› The **Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media** coordinates **the National Advisory Council for Online Safety (NACOS),** comprising 20 members and a chairperson representing children's and parents' organisations, major online platforms (including Google), and experts, serving as a forum for discussing online safety issues. The Department also oversees the development of the **National Counter Disinformation Strategy**[179] shaped by the OSMR and DSA legislations.[180] The strategy aims to review existing media literacy initiatives in Ireland and explore possibilities for a more joined-up approach between relevant government bodies to enhance the development of media literacy initiatives.[181] Informing this strategy, the **National Counter Disinformation Strategy Working Group**[182] aims to identify the role of media literacy in supporting and mapping media literacy initiatives that can help deliver a targeted whole of Government approach to countering disinformation.[183]

› **The Department of Justice** is responsible for developing policy in relation to the criminal use of the internet and information technology generally. Notably, the department plays a significant role in coordinating the **Safer Internet Centre** in Ireland (see Webwise in annex), which focuses on promoting awareness and empowerment, including digital and media literacy. This centre, supported by European Union funding through the **Connecting Europe Facility Safer Internet Programme**, offers three main services: a national awareness centre (Webwise.ie), helplines (ISPCC Childline, NPC Primary for adults), and a hotline (Hotline.ie).[184]

› **The Department of Foreign Affairs** has initiated the **Global Ireland Media Fund** to enhance citizen engagement with global issues, aligning with the government's Global Ireland Programme.[185] The **Media Challenge Fund** aims to foster citizen engagement on significant global developments relevant to Ireland, including those related to Ireland's UN Security Council membership, global challenges, and foreign policy priorities.[186]

› **The Data Protection Commission**[187] (DPC) is the supervisory authority for the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) that ensures that the fundamental right of individuals in the EU is to have their personal data protected. In significant rulings, the **Data Protection Commission** (DPC) has recently levied substantial fines on Meta (€405 million) in 2022 and TikTok (€345 million) in 2023. These penalties were accompanied by mandates for the platforms to implement a series of corrective actions. These decisions came in response to investigations revealing breaches of data regulations aimed at safeguarding child users, among other infringements.[188, 189]

› *An Garda Síochána* (the national police and security service of Ireland) is carrying out the garda primary schools programme[190] delivered to each class at least once every academic year, where Gardaí (police officers) talk on a range of topics such as vandalism, personal safety, and the impact of my behaviour on others, also in the online environment. Notably, *Garda Síochána* are also responsible for enforcing the **Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act, 2020**. The act introduced new offences concerning harassment and harmful communications, applicable both online and offline, and ensured the anonymity of victims. Known as 'Coco's Law',[191] it specifically outlaws image-based abuse and imposes substantial penalties. In terms of cyberbullying, this law also provides stronger measures against harassment.[192]

> **The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission**[193] (CCPC) is the Competent Authority under the **Digital Markets Act (DMA)** that aims to ensure that certain aspects are adhered to, including that so-called 'gatekeepers'[194] shall not cross-use personal data nor process such data for the purpose of advertising. The CCPC also aims to offer consumers practical and unbiased information about their rights, including those related to purchased digital content and services.

> **The Electoral Commission** (*An Coimisiún Toghcháin*), established in 2022 under the **Electoral Reform Act**, is central to Ireland's electoral system. Their mission involves regulating online paid-for political advertising, investigating falsehoods spread during elections, promoting public awareness of disinformation and manipulative behaviours, as well as providing educational programs to address these issues. [195,196]

Assessment of the strength of the overall national ML framework

The commitment of various public bodies to addressing key aspects of media literacy in Ireland indicates that media literacy is considered a cross-cutting policy priority. However, stakeholders consulted expressed concerns about fragmentation, noting disparities between national strategies and local implementation, such as libraries falling under local government jurisdiction. While important, national strategies often lack tangible outputs, as stakeholders call for concrete outcomes. Coordination is further complicated by the multistakeholder environment, highlighting the need to bring relevant actors together to oversee, collaborate, and set a coherent strategic direction for media literacy.[197]

> *'I would describe media literacy as a policy orphan. At the government or local levels, there isn't a specific department bringing all aspects of media literacy together.'*

Media literacy stakeholder, Ireland

While some stakeholders advocate for increased leadership in media literacy, there is widespread recognition of shared ownership in this area, with the diversity among stakeholders involved in media literacy policy also being perceived as a strength by many. The country's small size and history of cooperation facilitate a multistakeholder approach, enabling representatives from technology companies like Google, TikTok, and Meta, along with media companies, librarians, academics, and others, to effectively collaborate on campaigns and initiatives, leveraging diverse perspectives and expertise to enhance media literacy efforts.[198]

Reflecting on the above, it is important to stress that Ireland's regulatory framework on media has been undergoing significant growth since late 2022 and that this expansion phase is still underway. This is evidenced by the growth in staff size of CnAM, projected to rise from 40 employees in 2022, inherited from the predecessor BAI, to a staff count of 260 by 2025. CnAM also highlights that being a single authority that deals with DSA and OSMR 'under one roof' will help in enhancing efficiency and effectiveness in regulatory oversight.[199] Meanwhile, there are still concerns among some consulted stakeholders about CnAM's capacity to manage a large number of complaints and enforce the DSA and OSMR, especially considering Ireland's hosting of several of the world's largest tech companies and the responsibility that falls on its authorities to uphold legislation influencing users around the world.[200]

The launch of the ambitious OSMR legislation has drawn both praise and criticism. By issuing the Bill, Ireland looks to go further than the DSA by not only addressing *illegal* content but also *harmful* content.[201] Meanwhile, the strong emphasis on child safety has received strong support among ML stakeholders, further reinforced through input from the **Youth Advisory Council**, mandated by law for the Commission to consult when formulating codes pertaining to children's safety. [202] There has also been positive feedback regarding the transparent and inclusive development of the OSMR, notably regarding public consultation launched for the inaugural binding **Online Safety Code** focusing on video-sharing platform service providers to enhance the effectiveness of measures addressing online harms, with the consultation receiving over 1000 responses.[203]

Meanwhile, concerns have also been raised that overlaps between DSA and OSMR have still not been 'worked through', given the similarities in timing and scope between the two legislations.[204] While how they will work in tandem remains to be seen, some legal analysts argue that the potential divergence between the DSA and OSMR may cause complex jurisdictional and procedural issues. This complexity may arise, for example, from the co-existence of parallel dispute resolution mechanisms – key elements of both legislations – that will be established to empower users to challenge online content decisions.[205]

The current state of media literacy

Ireland has a number of comparative advantages when it comes to media literacy. Firstly, the social fabric of the country is relatively robust in comparison to many other countries, with media literacy levels only observed to be higher in five other European countries in 2023 (FI, DK, NO, EE, SE).[206] There is also a longstanding tradition of teaching media literacy in schools.

In the Irish education system, media literacy has been present since the early 1990s, both in the English curriculum and as a thematic element within social, personal and health education (SPHE). While MIL is not taught as a separate subject in Irish schools, aspects of media literacy, such as critical thinking, are taught across various subjects and at different levels.[207] At the same time, according to the 2022 Media Pluralism Monitor,[208] there remains substantial scope for mainstreaming media literacy into Irish primary and secondary education.

Digital literacy is widely considered to hold a higher status within the national curriculum compared to media literacy.[209] Highlighting both literacies, the Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027 has flagged that reform of primary, junior and senior cycle curricula is underway to ensure *'that young people are equipped to participate fully in modern society, including through the development of digital literacy and skills'*.[210] This aligns with the definition of digital literacy that has been expressed at the EU level, indicating that digital literacy *'includes competences that are variously referred to as information literacy and media literacy, computer and ICT literacy.'*[211]

An expert consulted for this study welcomed the reform highlighted by the Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027, but saw a need to distinguish media literacy and digital literacy in Irish ML policy. They stressed that whereas the latter can be quantified through tangible skill sets like computer operation, media literacy tends to involve more subjective interpretation and critique of media content. For instance, a young person may know how to use a search engine but lack any understanding of how the results are determined and why they might be biased or limited. It was also highlighted that there is a broader discussion about the limitations of adding more subjects to an already packed curriculum. While core literacy skills like numeracy and reading remain fundamental, there is also a need for clarity on which aspects of digital media and information literacy are essential and how best to deliver them.[212]

Qualitative findings further highlighted the importance of integrating media literacy in teacher training, which entails providing these skills to teachers during their undergraduate studies and through continuous professional development. Currently, they argued, teacher training programs in Ireland often fall short in adequately covering technology-related topics, especially those beyond basic usage, and this becomes particularly evident when addressing complex subjects like AI.[213]

Among the adult population, media literacy levels in Ireland are among the highest in Europe, according to several indicators. According to the European Commission 2022 DESI report,[214] Ireland is among the top performers, with 70% of their population having at least basic digital skills, compared to the EU average of 54%.[215] Irish media remain relatively well-trusted by international standards, and overall trust in the news has remained stable at 52%, according to the 2022 Reuters Institute Digital News Report.[216] A share of 83% of people get news online each week, and 51% via social media.[217]

> *'Media literacy must be viewed through a lifelong learning lens. While it's critical to integrate media literacy extensively into school curricula, relying solely on teaching secondary students is not enough. Individuals require ongoing training to navigate the complexities of the digital age effectively.'*
>
> **Media literacy stakeholder, Ireland**

However, available data also suggest that there are signs of a digital divide that may be associated with levels of media literacy. In 2020, a survey conducted by Accenture found that 42% of Irish adults describe themselves as being 'below average' for digital skills, and 40% of those with poor digital skills did not see a need to improve.[218] This suggests that there is a need to expand opportunities for lifelong learning, which could involve improving the resources and programmes offered by adult education institutions, public libraries, civil society, and businesses. Secondly, these findings indicate a need to raise awareness about the importance of digital and media literacy among the general population. Dealing with disinformation presents a particular challenge, as those who require support the most may be less likely to actively seek it out.[219]

Recently, disinformation and the current state of media literacy among adults became topics of national debate following the riots in Dublin in November 2023, which were events that exposed racism and frustration at housing and the cost-of-living crisis.[220] At the time, the Irish police issued a statement that it was *'surprised at the speed disinformation spread online',* observing that politically extremist bloggers used social media and false accounts to raise social tensions and share false narratives of incidents.[221]

In a resolute response, the newly established CnaM, which had not yet acquired its statutory powers under the **Digital Services Bill**, leveraged their relationships and invited the major platforms Google, X, TikTok, as well as the EU Commission to a meeting, taking place already the day following the riots. During the meeting, the Irish Media Minister received an update on how the platforms had responded and triggered their 'incident response plans'.[222]

> *'During incidents such as these, we [Google] focus not only on tackling harmful or illegal content but also ensuring that our systems prioritise connecting users with high-quality news from authoritative sources.'*

Ryan Meade, Google's government affairs and public policy manager in Ireland.

These incidents suggest the potential importance of tech platforms in addressing the spread of false information to protect society from harm. They also draw attention to the necessity and urgency of interventions, such as content moderation and fact-checking, which may help minimise the reach and potential impact of disinformation.

Wider landscape of media literacy initiatives

The Irish media literacy landscape is shaped by initiatives at both the EU and national levels, reflecting a dynamic interplay between different layers of governance. It is also worth noting that media literacy in Ireland draws from established practices in education and community development that, in many cases, have their origin in national media literacy policy. Alongside these initiatives, several civil society organisations view media literacy as a valuable aspect of their programmes, mainly aimed at empowering youth.[223]

Gathering 300 ML stakeholders across the country, **Media Literacy Ireland**[224] is the central node of media literacy in Ireland. It is an independent, informal alliance of organisations and individuals working together voluntarily to promote media literacy in Ireland. Its overarching mission is to empower Irish people with the skills and knowledge to make informed choices about the media content and services that they consume, create and disseminate – across all media platforms.[225]

Spotlight 2 – The four main tasks of Media Literacy Ireland[226]

1. **Coordination:** To be the acknowledged first port of call to provide support and advice for media literacy stakeholders (national and international).

2. **Communication:** To foster discussion and debate around all aspects of media literacy in Ireland to help identify emerging issues, gaps in provision, and opportunities for collaboration.

3. **Innovation:** To inspire, encourage and facilitate the development of new media literacy projects, programmes and interventions, and encourage evaluation and sustainability

4. **Promotion:** To use the strength, reach and expertise of MLI members to highlight media literacy related issues and sign-post sources of support via multi-stakeholder public awareness campaigns.

Media Literacy Ireland operates independently of the Government and no Ministry representative sits on the Steering Group.[227] The BAI/CnaM has in recent years held the position of co-chair of the Steering Group, comprised of the following members:

> The radio independent sector

> News publisher (NewsBrands Ireland)

> Community and Voluntary (Age Action)

> National Regulator (BAI/CnaM)

> Community Media (CRAOL)

> Education and Youth (Webwise – see annex)

> Journalism/News/Data (TheJournal)

> Commercial Radio (Learning Waves)

> Film (Irish Film Institute)

> Commercial Media (Virgin Media)

> Public Service Media (TG4)

> Digital Media/Technology Platforms (currently represented by **Google**)

> Information Society (Library Association of Ireland)

> Academia (Technological University Dublin)

Alongside core activities such as the annual ML conference and **Be Media Smart campaign** (see section 3 below), the Media Literacy Ireland Awards[228] is a flagship initiative that aims to recognise impactful work that promotes media literacy in Ireland, encompassing the categories of i.) *Best youth-led MLI intervention, ii.) Best ML intervention,* iii.) *ML champion (personal award)* and iv.) *MLI member special contribution,* recognising the specific contribution of an MLI member.

One prominent expert in the field who was consulted highlighted challenges related to the fact that Media Literacy Ireland currently operates under the facilitation of CnAM, raising questions about independence and sustainability. Relying heavily on volunteers without a dedicated full-time role, Media Literacy Ireland faces challenges in terms of independence and long-term viability. Inspired by the Finnish example KAVI,[229] the expert favoured establishing a separate statutory body that would ensure a more structured and sustainable approach to media literacy efforts. With dedicated funding and resources, such an organisation could conduct independent research, participate in European-funded projects, and enhance the credibility of media literacy initiatives. Moreover, it would address concerns about accountability and independence, being more shielded from external influence than MLI in its current format.[230]

Among other important ML national actors are Webwise (see the annex) and the DCU FuJo Institute,[231] the latter being a multidisciplinary research centre focused on the digital transformation of media, democracy, and society. Among other topics, the Institute investigates how to counter disinformation and 'digital hate', how to enhance democratic participation, and how to secure the sustainability of high-quality journalism. The FuJo Institute has participated in and led several projects related to promoting media literacy in Ireland, including Teamlit,[232] a pan-European project that offers teacher education in digital and media literacy and, in so doing, directly advancing students' abilities to tackle disinformation.

At a European level, EDMO Ireland has been set up as a national hub for the **European Digital Media Observatory**, which is co-funded by the European Union. Its key objectives include monitoring and analysing disinformation, conducting fact-checks and investigations, developing media literacy resources, informing policy, advancing disinformation detection tools, conducting research, and enhancing capacity among Irish stakeholders.[233] Consulted stakeholders suggest that EDMO Ireland has faced challenges in establishing a working organisation, as it has struggled to meet stringent co-funding conditions.[234]

Would you like to learn more about specific initiatives on the ground?

For a closer look at a set of Irish media literacy initiatives with potential for transferrable learning, check out the options below:

Initiative 1: **Be Media Smart Campaign** – *an anti-disinformation campaign and website sharing tips on how to talk to family and friends who are sharing disinformation*

Initiative 2: **Barnardos Online Safety Programme** – *child-centred workshops to teach children to stay safe online*

Initiative 3: **Webwise** – *free teaching materials for primary and secondary schools to support educators*

Looking ahead

Future challenges and opportunities

Ireland, known for hosting some of the world's leading technology firms, has both a unique opportunity to play a significant role in shaping effective platform accountability measures and the potential to become a hub for innovation in online safety. To match these high ambitions, the country will also need to create conditions for a balanced, thriving, and strong media sector while ensuring that individuals possess the necessary skills and knowledge to engage critically with content and navigate the digital landscape effectively.

In this regard, there are some clear challenges ahead for the country. The Irish government anticipates that the coming decade will be highly disruptive for Ireland's media system as technological advances and changing consumer behaviour challenge media to develop new business models and new ways to engage with audiences.[235] The spread of disinformation in the less-regulated online spaces, they highlight, risks undermining public confidence in news and information.[236] Looking to the future, forthcoming media models must explore new ways of engaging with audiences or risk losing them. These models must also prioritise diversity, accessibility, inclusivity, and representation of contemporary Ireland.

Table 1: Similarities and differences between the EU Digital Services Act and the Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022 ('the OSMR')

Broadcasting Act 2009, as mentioned OSMR Act 2022	EU DSA
Harmful online (Irish Definition broader)	Illegal content
Information society services (if designated)	Intermediary services
Video-sharing platform services (VSPS)	Online polatforms, VLOPs
Enforceable by CnaM (only)	Enforceable by European Commision and DSCs
Video-sharing platform services (VSPS)	Fine of up to 6% of annual worldwide turnover- Periodic penalty payments of up to 5% of average daily worldwide turnover
Content limitation notice	Cessation order
No equivalent	Users may seek compensation for breach
Main Obligations for non-VSPS	
Broadcasting Act – designated information society services	DSA-hosting services
Comply with online safety codes – may entail:	Comply with orders (illegal content, information)
Minimise availability of harmful online content	Transparency – reports on content moderation
Protect user against harmful online content	Terms of service – tools used for content moderation, dispute resolution
Deal with user complaints	Notification mechanism for illegal content
Comply with CnaM guidance	Obligation to notify if aware threat to life or safety

Source: Digital Services Bill (oireachtas.ie)

2.4 Italy

Country context

Policy and regulatory context

In contrast to some EU countries with established national media literacy strategies or dedicated bodies, Italy currently relies on **collaboration with sectoral stakeholders to promote media literacy initiatives**. In particular, the country strives to address media literacy as part of its commitment to advancing digital education. While a dedicated framework for counteracting disinformation and ensuring the transparency of digital media platforms is still under development, Italy already benefits from established legislation to safeguard freedom of expression online.

Italy's current media literacy strategy is outlined in a legislative decree issued in 2021,[237] which incorporates the European Directive on Audiovisual Media Services.[238] This decree assigns **responsibility for the development of media literacy across societal sectors to the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Enterprises and Made in Italy, and the Agency of Communication (AGCOM), in collaboration with media service providers and video-sharing platform providers**. While state actors are tasked with promoting and monitoring media literacy initiatives, media service providers and video-sharing platform providers are expected to *'establish effective measures and tools for media literacy and raise user awareness about such measures and tools'.*[239]

These entities are encouraged, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, to promote media literacy initiatives. To facilitate this, the government has allocated a fund of €1 million to support media service providers and video-sharing platforms in implementing and promoting media literacy initiatives for children from 2023 to 2025[240].

Another cornerstone of the national strategy on media literacy lies within the **National Digital School Plan (PNSD)**,[241] mandated by the 'La Buona Scuola' law, which focuses on fostering innovation in the school system and maximising the opportunities presented by digital education. Within the Plan, Action 14 is dedicated to establishing a cohesive framework for digital competencies and media literacy. This action emphasises **the integration of media education into digital skills development**, recognising that the digital is '*a "conveyor belt," a medium... through which to develop and practice competencies and attitudes, within and through each discipline.*'[242] With multi-year validity, the PNSD is also designed to **enhance the presence of digital tools in schools and boost their connectivity** through three strategic actions: deploying ultra-wideband fibre in every school, internal wiring of all school spaces, and implementing a connectivity fee.[243]

Ensuring that schools and students have access to the internet and related digital tools remains a priority and is considered a crucial step towards developing students' digital competencies. In response to the Covid-19 crisis, the Ministry of Education allocated €85 million to disseminate digital tools across disadvantaged educational institutions and students from low-income households to support them in delivering and accessing distance learning.[244] This fund **substantially accelerated the digital transition of schools,** providing crucial support in overcoming infrastructure barriers.

Alongside addressing the infrastructural limits of digital access, the PNSD also prioritises the acquisition and enhancement of students' digital skills. **Many schools have taken steps to promote digital skills by experimenting with and implementing Digital Curricula,** encouraging participatory planning experiences and creating, testing, and making available innovative, structured, and open educational curricula to all schools. Nonetheless, the adoption of these curricula is voluntary and based on the limits of each school's available human, financial, and instrumental resources.[245]

Over the years, the country has embraced several European and international initiatives on digital literacy, including the highly-influential **European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens** (DigComp 2.0). Recognising digital competence as a key skill for lifelong learning, the country has implemented various initiatives and proposals aimed at fostering responsible and safe use of digital technologies across learning, work, and social participation.

Although **Italy has yet to formulate legislation specifically targeting disinformation**, it draws on a range of existing laws and measures governing the journalistic profession, criminal offenses, and the broader European legislative framework. In response to the EU digital strategy development, some self-regulatory initiatives have been undertaken by the media authority. Most notably, the **Technical Committee** was established in 2017 to ensure online pluralism and provide reliable information.[246] However, this initiative did not involve key stakeholders and proved to be short-lived, with the last document released on June 26, 2020.[247]

On 17 February 2024, Italy transposed the Digital Services Act (DSA) into its national legislation.[248] Developed at the European level, **the DSA aims to create a safer online environment by introducing new obligations for digital platforms regarding content moderation and transparency**. While the DSA offers a framework for tackling disinformation and transparency online, Italy would benefit from developing a separate legislation specifically focused on this issue, which would allow it to address the rapid evolution of media more effectively in the digital age and the constant need to adapt tools and approaches.

Indeed, the **legislative framework governing media and communications remains rooted in the 1970s** and the transparency rules applicable to traditional media have not been extended to encompass digital platforms.[249] This omission has resulted in **limited transparency** concerning media ownership, investors, and budget details in the digital realm.[250] Proposing an extension of transparency standards from traditional media to the digital realm would strengthen the public's ability to understand and process information critically.

Italy relies on **established legislation to safeguard freedom of expression online**.[251] The state is empowered by law to limit or restrict this freedom by filtering or blocking internet content, applying criteria similar to those in the offline environment. These restrictions, including violations of criminal law (such as terrorism[252] and child sex abuse), unauthorised use of copyrighted content, gambling, and certain cases of unauthorised financial services, come with an available appeal mechanism to prevent arbitrary use of power.[253] The decisions on filtering and removing online content rest with digital platforms and are driven by their internal guidelines. While there is currently no evidence of illegal or arbitrary removals by these platforms, the absence of transparent and disaggregated data on the quantity, criteria, and motivations for blocking or removals itself poses a risk.

The current state of media literacy

Italy faces a significant literacy challenge compared to other European countries. International surveys reveal that Italian adults fall below the OECD average in literacy skills.[254]. Furthermore, Italian students consistently score lower than the OECD average on the PISA literacy test, specifically struggling with media literacy, fact verification, and identifying bias.[255] Alarmingly, almost half (44%) of Italian high school seniors lack basic literacy proficiency, as indicated by national assessments.[256]

This challenge extends to the digital realm. According to Eurostat indicators, the percentage of Italian youth aged 16 to 19 who adequately master digital tools is 20 points below the EU average.[257] These statistics are further confirmed by the European Commission DESI index, showing that only 45% of the population possesses basic digital skills (compared to EU average of 54%), leaving Italy to rank 24th among the EU27 Member States. Italy also exhibits a digital divide that exacerbates educational inequalities.[258] This is due both to limited internet access and to a low capacity for effective technology utilisation.[259] Despite a national average of 76.1% of connected families, regions such as Calabria (67.3%), Molise and Basilicata (69%), Sicily (69.4%), and Puglia (69.6%) lag significantly behind.

In this context, **traditional media outlets dominate as the primary source of information**. According to a 2023 report from CENSIS, nearly half of the population relies on television channels for news.[260] The internet follows closely, with 29.6% favouring various online sources such as websites/apps of traditional publishers, digital newspapers, social networks, search engines, news aggregators, portals, and blogs. **Facebook emerges as the most popular tool for news dissemination after television.**[261] Beyond Facebook, 18.5% of the population gets information from YouTube, 15.4% from Instagram, 7% from TikTok and 3% from X (previously Twitter).

Despite their widespread use, **Italians have significantly lower trust in social media as a reliable news source compared to traditional media**. Only 30.4% consider social networks trustworthy for news, compared to 68% for television and 70.3% for radio. Websites, blogs, and online forums hold a middle ground, with 42.5% of individuals finding them reliable[262]. This trend diverges among **young people (aged 14-29), who demonstrate greater trust in traditional and digital media**, with 71.4% favouring television and 66.7% radio. In addition, they lean more towards digital media for news, with 43.1% trusting social networks and 49.8% trusting websites, blogs, and online forums.

In 2023, **43% of Italians have seen untrue or doubtful information**[263] on the internet news sites or social media. This percentage increases to **49% in adults (aged 25-34)** who have used internet in the past three months. Additionally, 45% of the Italian population in 2022 used social networks to follow the news.[264] As highlighted in the previous paragraph, television and radio are still perceived to be the most reliable sources of information, this growing trend of seeking out information online points to significant changes in Italian media habits.

Against this backdrop, interviewees have underlined the fact that the **information market is currently underperforming in terms of quality of information**, with engagement and clickbait dynamics engrained in the prominent business models. This fosters the perception of *info obesity*[265], in which citizens find it very difficult to trust key media providers.

The lack of trust is compounded by a prevalent belief among the Italian population (76.5%) that fake news is becoming increasingly sophisticated and difficult to identify. Indeed, 20.2% express a lack of confidence in their ability to recognise false information, while 61.1% feel they possess only partial skills in this regard.[266] A significant share of the population (29.7%) denies the existence of fake news and the phenomenon of disinformation.[267] This sentiment is particularly pronounced among the elderly (35.8% are over 64) and individuals with lower levels of education (40.4% of those with at most a middle school diploma agree).

Although national politics dominate Italian interest, media literacy experts warn that particularly **inflammatory topics are more susceptible to fake news**. This is evident with topics like immigration, COVID-19, and the war in Ukraine, which have become prime targets for disinformation.[268,269,270]

'The simplicity of the topic greatly affects the amount of information produced, which is then reduced to slogans and potential fake news.'

Media literacy stakeholder, Italy

While the country lacks a media literacy strategy, it is evident that addressing the lack of trust in digital media and enhancing individuals' confidence in their ability to discern misleading information are two key priorities for media literacy initiatives. Providing tools to assist citizens in evaluating the quality of news is essential across all age groups. However, it is important to note that these initiatives should be accompanied by efforts to further develop and enhance digital skills and competencies. Special attention should be given to the elderly, who appear to be particularly vulnerable to disinformation.

Wider landscape of media literacy initiatives

While indicators suggest a significant media literacy gap in Italy, **existing media literacy policies and initiatives are limited in scope and resources**[271]. The 2022 Media Pluralism Monitor report underscores this by highlighting the lack of substantial national policy efforts to improve media literacy for all ages.[272] Furthermore, the absence of a unified national strategy creates a fragmented landscape. Regional initiatives, while important, may not effectively target areas with the greatest need.

The **current landscape in Italy draws heavily on the work of non-profit civil society organisations specialising in media literacy**.[273] These organisations play a crucial role by fostering collaboration and sharing best practices, often connecting with municipalities, public bodies, and even collaborating on a European scale. However, a key limitation exists: the absence of a national database that comprehensively organises resources related to digital and media education, as well as media literacy itself.[274]

Would you like to learn more about specific initiatives on the ground?

For a closer look at a set of Italian media literacy initiatives with potential for transferrable learning, check out the options below:

Initiative 1: Empowering Schools in Self-Regulation of Media and Information Literacy processes (EMILE) – *equipping teachers and students with media literacy tools*

Initiative 2: Be Internet Awesome (Vivi Internet al Meglio) – *fostering digital citizenship in learners of all ages*

Initiative 3: Fact-Checking Engagement Project – *a practical tool to increase fact-checkers effectiveness*

Looking ahead

Future challenges and opportunities

As seen in preceding sections, Italy is facing a series of broader challenges when it comes to media literacy, which key stakeholders will need to continue addressing in the years to come. Of particular importance are the relatively low digital skills and media literacy levels, coupled with a significant digital divide when it comes to digital infrastructure and tools among segments of the Italian population. The latter is further complicated by a national landscape in which the quality of media information is reported to vary significantly. A more coordinated media literacy policy approach at the country-level constitutes a key opportunity to address these issues in the future.

Moreover, while the country boasts a flourishing AI startup scene, **public perception of AI remains largely negative**, hindering its potential applications in tackling misinformation and deepfakes. This negative narrative, coupled with limited public understanding of AI capabilities, risks hindering the integration of responsible AI tools into media literacy initiatives. **Reframing this narrative** to encourage more critical thinking about the uses of AI and a balanced approach to the opportunities and challenges it introduces, is crucial to leverage ethical and responsible adoption in the learning environment. Interventions and initiatives should aim at reshaping this narrative and providing users and citizens with the skills and knowledge to use these tools effectively and responsibly.

'As the digital revolution seems to outpace teacher training, educators are left without proper preparation, potentially leading to a ban on AI tools in education rather than their effective adoption.'

Media literacy stakeholder, Italy

There was a broad consensus among key stakeholders that **future ML initiatives should prioritise continuity and incorporate AI into existing initiatives for media literacy** – an approach that may address both traditional challenges and those emerging with new technologies. Additionally, it is crucial to recognise that media literacy remains a continuous effort, even with growing investments in AI. Key stakeholders further acknowledged that, while grants directed toward AI are positive developments, they should not overshadow the need for critical thinking skills, which remain essential for evaluating information effectively.

Finally, a **targeted approach** is essential for different demographics. While integrating AI into learning can benefit all, specific support and tailored tools are crucial for groups like the elderly who face greater difficulties adapting to new technologies. This includes leveraging AI to create platforms and tools specifically designed to empower individuals with diverse learning needs.

By adopting a comprehensive and collaborative approach that prioritises responsible AI use, targeted user education, and continuous engagement, Italy can navigate the emerging challenges and unlock the potential of these tools to foster a more informed and critical (digital) citizenship.

2.5 Poland

Country context

Policy and regulatory context

Media literacy features weakly in Poland's legislation and national policies. There is no single legal act or national-level strategy to cover all aspects of media literacy, with various elements such as media education, combating misinformation, and privacy rights being dispersed through several documents. Furthermore, different aspects of media literacy fall within the competencies of different public institutions with no top-down coordination and, as a consequence, overlapping actions such as information campaigns are run by both the **Ministry of Education** and the **Ministry of Digital Affairs**.

Poland is also lagging in implementing key EU legal acts related to media literacy. The Audio-Visual Media Services Directive was implemented in 2021 with an amendment to the law on **The National Broadcasting Council**, whereas the **Digital Services Act** and **AI Act** have not yet been implemented. The work on an act implementing the former started only in January 2024; the latter has not yet been discussed, aside from a report by the **Working Group on AI** within the Ministry of Digital Affairs.[275]

Among the public actors involved in actions related to media literacy, the **Ministry of Education** is responsible for the development of skills, while the **Ministry of Digitalisation** is responsible for monitoring digital services and also skills development, and the **National Broadcasting Board** is responsible for policies on broadcasting. Various other institutions cover additional specific aspects of media literacy:[276] the **National Security Bureau**, **Ministry of Justice**, **Ministry of Foreign Affairs**, **Research and Academic Computer Network**, **Chancellery of the Prime Minister**, and the **Government Centre for Security** all play specific roles relating to national security issues. With no coordination and a variety of actors, public media literacy initiatives tend to be ad-hoc interventions rather than well-designed, coherent programmes.

The concept of misinformation is absent in the Polish legislative framework. However, several legal acts *de facto* provide instruments to combat some specific cases.[277] The **Polish Penal Code** includes regulations addressing defamation, understood as sharing false information about a given person. Journalists often criticise those regulations as they are easy to abuse, curbing freedom of speech.[278]

In 2023, in response to Russia's disinformation campaigns, a **separate regulation imposing prison sentences for sharing foreign disinformation** was imposed. Several laws target misinformation on consumer products; it is illegal, for example, to share false information about one's own or a competitor's products, and influencers are obliged to tag their materials as advertisements. Poland's penal code is moderately adjusted to modern needs. Cyberbullying is considered a crime, but on the other hand, there is no law to combat deep fakes.[279] With the development of artificial intelligence and large language models, penalisation of deepfakes targeted to harm individuals is considered the most urgent issue to be regulated.

Since the implementation of the GDPR Regulation, privacy rights in Poland are considered to be well-secured. A separate institution – the **Personal Data Protection Office** – monitors data privacy abuses with broad competencies. Access to public information is problematic. On one hand, public institutions are obliged to share information in the **Public Information Bulletin**; on the other hand, NGOs often warn of abuses in access to information.

Media and press freedom in Poland is concerning. Although **Article 54 of Poland's Constitution guarantees the freedom of expression and sharing information**, several concerns undermine this theoretical freedom. The World Press Freedom Index from Reporters Without Borders assessed the situation in Poland in 2022 as 'problematic', particularly due to the status of national broadcasters. Since 2016, public television has evolved towards being a propaganda instrument of the governing party, and following the 2023 elections, the new government forced the reorganisation of public media, which some saw as abusing an existing law. Media pluralism was further compromised, and several actions targeted private broadcasters. The largest private television company, identified with the then-opposition party, TVN, was initially refused a concession. In 2020, state-owned and politicians '-controlled oil company Orlen purchased Polska Press, the publisher of dozens of local newspapers. Online media are primarily free, however. A brief proposal to introduce the **Internet Freedom Act** never materialised, and no similar initiative is currently being discussed.

Media education is embedded to a limited extent in Poland's education system. Media literacy skills are explicitly defined in the core curriculum, a document that serves as a basis for all the study programmes. The core curriculum for elementary school assumes that all the graduates should be able to *'find, sort, critically analyse and use information from different sources'*. Expectations for high school graduates are more specific and point that they should be able to *'make conscious and responsible choices in the use of internet resources, critically analyse information, safely move in digital space and make relationships with other internet users'*. Those assumptions, however, often fail to be implemented. Learning outcomes on media literacy are not included in examination standards; therefore, there is no tool to validate them. Since the core curriculum in Poland is considered too broad to be thoroughly taught, skills that are not a subject of external examination are the first to be skipped by teachers.

Recently, there have been some signals that there will be more focus on media literacy in the near future. In 2023, the government introduced the **Programme for the Development of Digital Skills**. Furthermore, the national education strategy for the school year 2023/2024 defines as one of ten priorities: a *'support of digital skills of students and teachers, with a special reference to a safe use of web and critical analysis of information in the Internet'*. However, it should be noted that new priorities focus on technical skills rather than broader media literacy skills. The validation of critical thinking skills is still absent in schools.

To sum up, Poland's policy framework related to media literacy is fragmented and uncoordinated and does not address all the relevant aspects of the problem. Among the most important issues to be solved are regulations on deepfakes and other threats posed by the use of AI, validation of media literacy skills in schools, and focus on a broader understanding of media literacy, not limited to combating disinformation and the development of digital skills. It should be, however, noted that several stakeholders expressed an opinion that the current national legislation related to media literacy is sufficient and actions should be taken on the EU level. Some experts point out that national legislation is ineffective and poses threats to media and press freedom. As freedom of press in Poland is already seen as 'problematic', any propositions for further regulation meet a resistance.

The current state of media literacy

Polish society is widely exposed to the threats related to misinformation. Actual vulnerability is difficult to assess – there are no population-wide reports on media literacy levels, in particular among adult citizens. Some indirect evidence shows that even though an average level of media literacy or digital skills is low, Polish citizens are less vulnerable than in other countries of the region such as Czech Republic or Slovakia. Explanation for this difference is not clear, though historical factors, most notably a long-lasting exposure to Russia's disinformation strategies, play a role.

Media consumption

Media consumption practices in Poland are highly dependent on age cohort. Younger citizens mostly look for information online, whereas older generations tend to use traditional media, including mostly television and to a lower extent printed press. However, the situation is evolving: in 2023, over 90% of households had access to the internet and almost 60% of individuals were using e-government services. Research on youth shows that only 8% of students do not use digital media. Relative to other countries, Polish youth rarely use internet for school purposes and their consumption is dominated by entertainment. It should also be noted that international research on Y-skills show that Poland's youth declared the highest exposure to hate messages; eating disorders (32%), self-harm (19%),[280] as well as a very high exposure on cyberhate.[281]

Media literacy levels and awareness

There is only limited evidence on the current media literacy levels in Poland. The only comparable evidence related to the adult population is on digital skills, mostly with a focus on technical skills. DESI Index 2023 suggests that those skills are relatively low in Poland: only 42.9% of adults are considered to have at least basic digital skills – the third lowest share in the EU.[282] Similarly, according to *Statistics Poland's* 2023 report, a quarter of adult Poles have low or no digital skills.[283] Furthermore, 4.3% of individuals declare they have internet experience but no information and data literacy skills.[284] Also, research on youth shows that digital skills are below the European average for the age cohort.[285]

Some smaller studies are addressing directly media literacy skills. According to one report, 44% of adult Poles failed a test to recognise fact from opinion, and only 4.5% were 100% right on all the test questions.[286] Another study shows that half of the population 'strongly agree' with at least one fake news piece on climate energy and over 40% on health.[287] Finally, one small study with a relatively small number of participants showed that the most 'credible' fake news was perceived as more accurate than the least credible fake news.[288] 30% of teenagers declare they can never identify fake news,[289] despite Poland's youth having framing conditions that are conducive to media literacy skills. According to international comparisons, general literacy and numeracy levels of Polish students are well above the EU average. In the last edition of PISA 2022, Polish 15-years-olds were 4th in OECD in mathematics, and significantly above the OECD average in reading.[290] There is evidence in the literature that strong foundational skills are correlated with better critical thinking and, therefore, with a lower probability of failing to identify misinformation.[291]

Poland is characterised by relatively high awareness of misinformation, but moderate or low awareness of its specific aspects. NASK's report on elections shows that 63.9% of adults believed that there exists misinformation aimed at elections.[292] Furthermore, Eurobarometer data shows that exposure to misinformation among Polish adults is among the EU's highest. 48% of respondents declare encountering some false information or manipulation almost every day, compared with the 37% EU average.[293] On the other hand, not all the concepts are well recognised; for example, 49% of individuals have never heard of fake news.[294] Remarkably, awareness is not evenly-distributed according to age cohorts: only 21% of young people (15-24 years old) declared not knowing the concept of fake news, while the oldest (65 years old or more) share was 89%.

Media literacy practices

Media literacy practices require further improvements. 37% of Polish adults never check the credibility of information they find in traditional or social media.[295] Only 22% have ever heard of fact-checking and websites providing it, and of those, only a quarter regularly use fact-checking websites to search or check information.[296] Fact-checking websites are not, however, the only way to check information, and over 60% of adults declare that they check it elsewhere.[297] There is an interesting pattern in the perception of fake news: Polish people claim to find fake news more often on television than on social media.[298] Television is generally found to be the least credible source of information, followed by the Internet, whereas the newspapers are found to be the most trust-worthy.[299] Increasing polarisation has undermined media trust in Poland;[300] while in recent years, the media landscape has become increasingly dominated by 'identity media' – newspapers or televisions created by journalists openly supporting one of the political parties. Polarisation increased in recent years, in particular after the Smolensk air disaster in 2010, where among the victims was Lech Kaczyński, the president of Poland and a twin brother of a leader of one of two major political parties, Law and Justice.[301] The effect is less clear in cases of new media where, outside relatively small 'bubbles' of supporters of a given party, exposure to diverse opinions is wider.

Challenges

The most important societal challenge for media literacy is related to the war on Ukraine and the fact that Russia's disinformation strategies target Poland.[302] Even before the war, Russian sources shared disinformative reports. There are two main themes of disinformation: alleged Polish Russophobia and targeting Ukraine by focusing, for example, on the Wolyn genocide. Russian disinformation often places particular focus on history, for example with claims that Poland holds responsibility for World War II.[303] Such practices intensified after February 2022, and there are currently four main strands of disinformation: the alleged threats to local citizens created by the influx of refugees, the ineffectiveness of sanctions, the threat of an energy crisis, and the risk of a third world war. Google's prebunking campaign in 2022 attempted to tackle this problem and has seen some positive effects. Research on the effectiveness of Russia's disinformation shows that Polish society is significantly less vulnerable in comparison with the Czech Republic and Slovakia.[304]

Before the war the most widespread misinformation was related to the Covid-19 pandemic.[305] Research shows that targeting misinformation on information or lockdowns was particularly difficult, since there were different types of disinformation on different social media platforms: users of Facebook, YouTube or Wykop all focused on different topics. Particularly difficult to combat is grassroots disinformation – disinformation shared by 'innocent' users, who thoughtlessly reproduce fake information. Furthermore, Big-Tech platforms often failed to correctly identify fake news: only 1% of fake news on Facebook were marked as false information or deleted.[306] Covid-19 disinformation had a huge impact on health outcomes: Poland's Covid-19 vaccination level of 57% is one of the lowest in the EU, with Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria being the only member states with lower levels.[307]

A less researched topic often mentioned by misinformation experts is energy. As shown earlier, almost half of the respondents of one survey believed in at least one fake news on climate crisis or renewable energy. Misinformation poses also threats for the democratic process: during parliamentary elections in 2023 there were 227 reports on disinformation practices recorded.[308] Even though some of them were related to the violations of the election silence rather than misinformation, the problem is clear.

Some experts interviewed emphasised that the most important type of misinformation is currently fear mongering. Polish people are moderately vulnerable to belief in fake news, but much more vulnerable to vastly exaggerated reports on physical or economic safety. Both the Covid-19 pandemic and war on Ukraine delivered several examples of massive panicking in response to objectively minor news. Fuel shortages induced by panic buy-outs were moderately dangerous for the national safety but prove that the problem is significant.

Wider landscape of media literacy initiatives

Media literacy initiatives in Poland are numerous, though very much dispersed among various stakeholders, with no coherent programme addressing larger groups or topics. Some initiatives are ad-hoc or target small groups, and their overall impact is limited. Media literacy initiatives in Poland can be roughly divided into two categories: fact-checking initiatives and education initiatives. In both categories there are actions initiated by either NGOs, private sector or public institutions. The activities significantly increased in recent years, in particular triggered by Russian disinformation campaigns since annexation of Crimea in 2014 and Covid-19 pandemic.

Fact-checking is performed by several organisations. The oldest and most vital is **Demagog**,[309] founded in 2014, which claims to have debunked over 2000 fake news in ten years. Other relevant NGOs include the foundation '*Przeciwdziałamy Dezinformacji*' running the portal fakenews.pl;[310] **Pravda Association**[311] and the **Foundation of Reporters**.[312] A second group of fact-checking initiatives are run by media or press agencies. Notable examples include *Konkret24*, connected to the private television **TVN**,[313] and *SprawdzamAFP*, developed by the press agency AFP[314]. Additionally, **OkoPress**[315] is a fact-checking entity founded by a group of journalists, who currently focus more on investigative journalism than typical debunking. Public institutions are also involved in fact-checking initiatives: most notably, the **National Press Agency** (PAP) together with a governmental centre **Govtech** has been leading the project **'Fake Hunter'**,[316] supported with the *FakeHunter Challenge*, a competition for students.

Educational media literacy initiatives consist of trainings on media literacy skills or awareness-raising campaigns. The majority of trainings are addressed to school children, with a limited share of initiatives targeted at senior citizens and hardly any for population aged 25-64 years old. Google's **Be Internet Awesome** (*Asy Internetu*) is the largest non-governmental programme addressing school children and teachers, described in detail in the annex. Other notable examples are: **Keyboard Fighters** (*Wojownicy Klawiatury*), workshops for schools organised by the **Geremek Foundation** and **Robert Schuman Foundation**;[317] *Lekcja:Enter* project for schools, run by **Orange Foundation** between 2019-2023;[318] and the **Digital Citizen project** by **Foundation Pro Cultura**.[319] Projects by **Foundation Safer Internet**,[320] *Kościuszko Institute*[321] and the *Foundation Nowoczesna Polska*[322] focus on equipping teachers with useful tools (e.g. handbooks, lesson plans). Two examples of non-school initiatives are **e-senior 65+**, lead by a consortium of NGOs focusing digital skills for senior citizens;[323] and **Foundation Cybersecurity**, which consists of training for the general population on technical digital skills.

It should be noted that training initiatives tend to focus on technical skills rather than general critical thinking skills. Even within initiatives dedicated to tackling disinformation, there is an inclination towards narrow digital skills. Furthermore, experts point out that virtually all media literacy initiatives in Poland, while valuable, are one-off events. Therefore, their impact is limited more to awareness-raising than capacity-building. Several initiatives focus exclusively on awareness-raising through information campaigns or publishing analytical reports, such as the '**Infowarfare**' project lead by **Foundation Research Centre on Safety Environment**,[324] indEX, monitoring disinformation by Foundation of Reporters.[325] The aforementioned statistics regarding the low awareness of fake news and misinformation show that this approach is a necessary first step toward media literacy. However, for the results to be effective and enduring, more targeted actions are required.

Public institutions focus mostly on prebunking campaigns with a special reference to issues related to national safety. One key public programme is **'Safe Elections'** by Research and Academic Computer Network[326] monitoring disinformation regarding public elections in Poland and offering prebunking campaign. Several other institutions focus on Russia's disinformation campaigns, notable examples include #Fejkoodporni campaign by War Studies University,[327] **DisInfoRadar** by Government Centre for Safety.[328] Trainings are offered by the Centre for Media Education by Polish Radio.[329]

For more information on available media literacy initiatives, an in-depth summary of three examples (**Be Internet Awesome (*Asy Internetu*)**, **Fact-checking Academy (*Akademia Fact-Checkingu*)**, and **Cyberproof (*Cyberodporni*)**) is available in the annex.

Would you like to learn more about specific initiatives on the ground?

For a closer look at a set of Polish media literacy initiatives with potential for transferrable learning, check out the options below:

Initiative 1: **Be Internet Awesome** – *supporting Polish educators in teaching digital citizenship to young people*

Initiative 2: **Fact-checking Academy (Akademia Fact-Checkingu)** – *an online educational platform with ready-to-use lesson scenarios, online trainings and an educational game*

Initiative 3: **Cyberproof (Cyberodporni)** – *a handbook for students with chapters devoted to misinformation on different online platforms (incl. Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and TikTok)*

Looking ahead

Future challenges and opportunities

Experts foresee that the main challenges of misinformation in the near future will not differ from those in recent years. Most of the reports and expert interviews focus on Russia's disinformation campaign and declining trust in traditional media credibility as a result of political polarisation and the emergence of identity media.

New technologies such as generative AI have had a limited impact on the infosphere in Poland so far. Experts interviewed mentioned one notable example: the use of voice generators during the parliamentary elections campaign to falsely attribute words and phrases to politicians who had not said them. The emergence of deep-fakes, created with an intention to harm other people (and particularly in the form of revenge porn), is seen as one of the most significant contemporary technological threats. There is currently no legislation in Poland to prevent the use of deepfakes, meaning that their identification and combating is a challenges for Big Tech platforms and other stakeholders. Several other issues remain controversial, such as the use of AI-generated images to illustrate articles on conflicts in Gaza or in Ukraine.

AI is seen to have a significant impact on the education system. Experts expressed concern that while in the long-run generative models or other related tools hold significant potential to enhance learning, they also run the risk of deepening inequalities between students in the absence of a legislative framework for their use. The need to support teachers in adapting to effective and responsible AI use in learning environments was also highlighted. While there are already several examples emerging in the European context of AI tools being used to support personalised learning, spanning from formative assessment tools to homework support chatbots[330] there are also legitimate concerns around its misuses. For instance, experts interviewed in the context of this case study highlighted that students often use it to simply do their homework for them, in turn limiting their learning outcomes and introducing bad practices vis-a-vis critical thinking and the verification of information.

2.6 Romania

Country context

In the past 30 years, the Romanian media environment has transitioned from a monolithic structure to one increasingly driven by commercial interests, all while navigating economic and political pressures. The shift toward a free-market framework has not only reshaped the social and political fabric but has also significantly impacted the media sector. The Romanian media environment has transitioned from a monolithic structure to one increasingly driven by commercial interests, while navigating economic and political pressures. The shift toward a free-market framework has not only reshaped the social and political fabric but has also significantly impacted the media sector.

Policy and regulatory context

The legal framework

The regulatory framework regarding the media relies on the **AudioVisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD, 2018/1808)**, transposed into Romanian legislation in **Law no. 190/2022** for the amendment and completion of the Audiovisual Law no. 504/2002, for: (1) the amendment and completion of Government Ordinance no. 39/2005 regarding **cinematography**; (2) the amendment of Law no. 41/1994 regarding the **organization and operation of the Romanian Broadcasting Company** and the **Romanian Television Company.**

The **National Audiovisual Council (NAC)** is the sole regulatory authority in the field of audiovisual media services, and is the guarantor of the public interest in the field of audiovisual communication.[331] **NAC** must ensure the increase of the level of awareness of public opinion about the use of audiovisual media services, through the development and promotion media education to all social categories, including through or in partnership with the **Romanian Ministry of Education**. In the last Report on the Rule of law (2023) the **European Commission** emphasized that although a new audio-visual law was adopted *'the NAC is currently preparing public consultations on secondary legislation, which will clarify the implementation of the new legislative provisions in areas such as accessibility, promotion of European works or media literacy'.*

The **law no.190/2022** provides clarifications regarding the control of access to content[332], and to protect minors, the providers of video-sharing platforms are obliged to take measures to control access to content, by establishing effective measures and tools regarding education in the field of audiovisual media and increasing the level of information of users regarding those measures and tools.

In Romania, press freedom is guaranteed primarily by the **Romanian Constitution**, which states that the freedom of expression of thoughts, opinions, or beliefs, as well as the freedom of creation are inviolable, that any form of censorship is prohibited, and no publication can be suppressed.[333] On the other hand, the **Criminal Code** is the normative act that criminalizes crimes that can affect the freedom of the press, such as slander, insult and threat.

The freedom of expression of the press is also protected by the **Law on the status of the journalist**, as well as the **Journalist's Code of ethics**, documents that bring to the fore aspects such as the guarantee of freedom of expression, access to information, independence of journalists, etc.

Regarding false content, the **Romanian Penal Code**[334] refers to the dissemination of false information, emphasizing that: *'the communication or dissemination, by any means, of false news, data or information or of falsified documents, knowing their falsity, if this endangers national security, is punishable by imprisonment from 1 to 5 years.'*

In 2023, a bill was submitted to the Romanian Parliament – the **Law on the responsible use of technology in the context of the deepfake phenomenon** and is known as the 'deepfake law,' although it has not been adopted to date. According to the provisions of this bill, clear marking of deepfake content is required, either through overlaid text (covering at least 10% of the screen area) or through audio messages at the beginning and end of the material. Furthermore, deep fake content that impersonates public figures with the intent to discredit them and those that promote hate speech, violence, discrimination, or explicit sexual content are prohibited. The bill places responsibility on media platforms to implement measures to prevent the distribution of deepfakes, as well as to cooperate with authorities in identifying and removing illegal deepfakes. Fines and even the suspension of platform activities are mentioned if the requirements are not met.

On reviewing the media framework, it is apparent that there is no legal definition and provisions on media literacy together with the lack of jurisdiction or institutions to promote media education. Theoretically, **NAC** has responsibility in the field of promoting media literacy, but the institution does not have any coherent strategy in the field just some unarticulated interventions. Media regulation is almost exclusively shaped by state bodies such as parliamentary committees, state-administered regulators (**National Audiovisual Council** and **National Authority for Administration and Regulation in Communications**) and, occasionally, initiatives launched by members of parliament who usually have little to no expertise in the field.

The strategic framework

At the national and European levels, a series of strategies have been developed with a horizon extending to 2030. These refer to a broader spectrum of actions related to education and digital skills, as well as artificial intelligence, with elements focusing on media literacy being directly or indirectly addressed within them.

The **European Union** aims to improve the education systems of its member states using digital technology, providing common directions for action through the **Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027**[335]. This document aims to address two major challenges: the utilization of a wide and expanding array of digital technologies; and the equipping of learners with digital competencies (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) necessary to live, work, learn, and thrive in a world increasingly influenced by digital technologies. The objectives outlined in the document include the development of digital competencies, including media literacy, and combating misinformation.

Media literacy is highlighted as a necessary skill for everyday activities, an aspect found in the **European Skills Agenda**.[336] Additionally, the **Digital Competence Development Framework (DigComp)**, which provides tools for assessment, setting learning objectives, and identifying opportunities for education, training, and employment in the digital sphere, underscores the need for the development of competencies related to information and data literacy.

As member of the **European Union**, Romania transposes in its strategic documents all the directives and European strategic framework and it is the early stage of developing a more coherent approach regarding media literacy. Among the most relevant national strategies are the **Strategy regarding the digitization of education in Romania 2021-2027 (SMART EDU)** and the Strategy **Educated Romania** which outline measures aimed at developing digital skills, including through the development of digital literacy programs among preschoolers, students, teachers, parents, and the general population, with a focus on disadvantaged individuals.

Regarding artificial intelligence, the Strategy **Educated Romania,** the **National Strategy for Research, Innovation and SMART Specialization 2022-2027**, and the **National strategic framework in the field of artificial intelligence 2023-2027**, all underline the importance of AI development in Romania by facilitating the understanding and application of specific AI techniques through the development of human resources, involving the human factor in the analysis and validation of results generated by automated systems, as well as the use of AI methods in education to improve the educational process and the necessity of education in AI.

Another strategy containing elements targeting media literacy is the **Sectoral strategy in the field of culture 2023-2030 in Romania,** which refers to the partnership between the **Ministry of Culture** and the **Ministry of Education** in the context of the need to develop programs aimed at media literacy, the lack of digital skills being a barrier to cultural consumption. In this sense, the following are discussed: *'development of professional training programs, formal and/or informal, and/or professional conversion for acquiring skills specific to the new technologies (media/digital art, creation of digital cultural content, digital marketing, etc.)'.*

While there is an increasing recognition of the importance of media literacy in Romania, there are still significant gaps in terms of both policy and practice. The **National Strategy for Education and Digital Skills Development** includes media literacy as a priority area, but there is no specific funding allocated for media literacy initiatives. In terms of practice, media literacy education is not yet widely integrated into formal education, and there is a need for greater support for educators and the development of media literacy curricula.

The current state of media literacy

As in many other countries, the rise of digital platforms and social media has amplified the dissemination of disinformation. This has led to challenges in helping individuals, particularly young people, develop the skills necessary to differentiate between credible sources and misinformation. The spread of false information through social media has become a significant threat to informed decision-making and social cohesion. Efforts to address this issue include integrating media literacy education into formal curricula and promoting critical thinking skills. Recognizing the need for a comprehensive approach, some organizations have launched initiatives to raise awareness about disinformation, providing tools for fact-checking and critical evaluation of online content. However, challenges remain in ensuring that these efforts reach a broad audience and effectively equip individuals to combat the spread of disinformation. National initiatives focusing on media literacy in Romania play a pivotal role in addressing the challenges posed by the digital age and the proliferation of information, both accurate and misleading.

The need for media literacy has become increasingly apparent in recent years, with 55% of Romanians saying they have been exposed to fake news and misinformation (INSCOP Research, April 2021). Citizen susceptibility to conspiracies and misinformation is a central issue in Romania. Assessing 10 EU countries, **GLOBSEC** established that 39% of respondents in Romania believed conspiracy theories and misinformation. Romania is the European country with the lowest level of basic digital skill compared to the EU average, according to **Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI)**. The lack of digital and media literacy skills is also affecting the youth, who are highly influenced by what they see on social media platforms. And, according to a study conducted by the **Center for Independent Journalism (CIJ)** in 2022, most of them were unable to identify elements in suspicious articles or posts.

Romania ranks 31st out of 41 European countries in the 2021 edition of the **Media Literacy index** that assesses the resilience potential to fake news, using indicators for media freedom, education and trust in people. The countries are grouped in clusters from the best performing countries in the 1st cluster, to the poorly performing ones in the last 5th cluster. Romania is included in the fourth cluster with problematic countries, but still not those with the poorest performance. The 4th cluster includes the "expanded" Balkan countries from BiH, Romania and Bulgaria to Turkey and Moldova as well as Ukraine and Moldova.

The research paper titled 'Media Literacy and Disinformation Response Readiness in Romania'[337] released in 2023 by **Read Twice** and the '*Se Poate*' **Association**, reveals that while media literacy importance is acknowledged in Romania, there are still significant gaps.

Strategic educational and digitalization documents developed at the national level, and described in the previous section, emphasize the significance of media literacy. However, there is a notable absence of dedicated financial resources allocated towards media literacy initiatives. In terms of practice, media literacy education is not yet widely integrated into formal education, and there is a need for greater support for educators and the development of media literacy curricula.

Disinformation in Romania

Referring to disinformation, the study 'Media Literacy and Disinformation Response Readiness in Romania' underlines the fact that in Romania it is known that there is a need to make considerable efforts to combat disinformation and fake news, a phenomenon that manifests itself especially in certain contexts, such as the case of elections, in the context of COVID-19, vaccination campaigns and more recent on aggression of Russia in Ukraine.

The paper on the '*Disinformation Landscape in Romania*',[338] authored by Dr. Ciprian Cucu from the University of Alba Iulia, highlights the limited legal framework concerning false information in Romania. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was discourse surrounding a legal provision aimed at penalizing actions that contradict disease prevention efforts. However, applying this provision to combat disinformation has proven challenging.

Susceptibility to fake news and misinformation is a trait observed across all categories and segments of people in Romania, as pointed out in the study *'Media Literacy and Disinformation Response Readiness in Romania',* as well as according to the information that the interviewed persons provided.

Young people and digital natives, despite their familiarity with technology, can still be manipulated due to their trust in online information and the sheer volume of content they encounter. Individuals with digital skills may struggle to critically evaluate sources, making them more susceptible to believing and sharing false information. Additionally, the demands of daily life and time constraints can lead people to accept information without verifying its accuracy beforehand.

Furthermore, certain demographics such as the elderly, individuals with limited education, and children are particularly vulnerable to disinformation. Factors contributing to their susceptibility include their relatively recent introduction to the internet for older individuals, a tendency to trust information at face value, and challenges in verifying the credibility of sources. Moreover, concerning children, it has been observed that parents often struggle to monitor their children's online activity and fail to restrict access to certain content.

Wider landscape of media literacy initiatives

The research identified a wide range of initiatives directly and indirectly addressing media literacy objectives. The increasing prevalence of digital platforms and social networks has intensified the spread of disinformation, highlighting the importance of assisting the population in developing the essential skills to distinguish between credible sources and misinformation. The need for a comprehensive approach is recognized at national level, a series of initiatives being undertaken by the state, public authorities, educational institutions, NGOs and other stakeholders.

Although media literacy is not included in the national curriculum as a mandatory subject, there are secondary schools and higher education institutions that run media literacy courses, for example:

› Secondary schools: The National College *Gheorghe Lazar* in Bucharest features a media literacy program as part of its curriculum, and *Spiru Haret* National College in Bucharest provides an optional course in media literacy.

› Higher education institutions: The **Faculty of Communication and Public Relations** at the **National University of Political Studies and Public Administration** in Bucharest offers courses on media literacy, media ethics, and media law and the **Faculty of Journalism and Communication Sciences** at the **University of Bucharest** provides courses on media literacy and related topics, including fake news and disinformation.

Media education programmes were developed within large training programmes funded by EU Cohesion Policy programmes such as **CRED** (Curriculum project, open education for all, and implemented within funded by Human Capital Operational Program 2014-2020). 21 integrated optional programs were created, dedicated to both the secondary school cycle and second chance programs, some of these including media literacy were:

› '**Digital culture'** is centred on the support of new technologies on the valorisation of the message/ vision of the world of the author of an artistic work, seen as an expression of human experience. It also considers the transition of students from passive receivers of the message to active receivers, able to capitalize on information, ideas, techniques, and languages in the creation of new multimedia products.

› '**The everyday world in one year**' considers the wide circulation of information, and by studying this optional program students can find out, analyse and understand events from various fields that take place locally and globally. The use of investigation as a method of approach helps to create authentic learning situations, with an emphasis on activities that help students to differentiate between opinion and fact, to be able to evaluate the credibility of information sources.

› 'Applied ethics' – addresses the issue of ethics in the field of media/information, and artificial intelligence, among which are fields that raise discussions, controversies, misinformation in the contemporary world.

These initiatives consisting in the creation of optional subjects are welcome, and represent an important step in the development of the concept of media literacy and its introduction in educational institutions in Romania. However, there is no obligation to opt for such subjects in schools, the decision being left to the discretion of educational institutions and parents.[339] Currently, there is no available data regarding the educational institutions that have opted for selecting an optional subject developed through the **CRED** project, as there is no practice of collecting such data. The optional subjects developed through the **CRED** project continue to be part of the list of optional subjects approved by the **Ministry of Education**, for which educational institutions and implicitly parents can opt.[340]

Many actors are involved in financing and implementing media literacy initiatives and combating misinformation. Among them, the **Center for Independent Journalism Romania** organizes informational events for the general public, training programs for teachers, and workshops for children from various regions of the country. The **Funky Citizens Association** is involved in promoting and carrying out actions aimed at media literacy, providing educational resources, and addressing a wide range of audiences, especially people belonging to various disadvantaged groups (youth, migrants, individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds). Additionally, **Funky Citizens** is involved in fact-checking, providing the population with information regarding the accuracy of news appearing in the public space.

The **Bulgarian-Romanian Observatory of Digital Media (BROD)**, led by the **Big Data for Smart Society Institute (GATE)**, carries out activities under the umbrella of an extended partnership. These activities include research, fact-checking, educational resources, and training events. The **National Audiovisual Council** conducts projects in the field, along with media literacy actions in collaboration with local public authorities and educational institutions. The activities carried out consist of organizing workshops for students, teachers, and librarians.

For more information on available media literacy initiatives, an in-depth summary of three examples (**The Bulgarian-Romanian Observatory of Digital Media** activities, **Factual by Funky Citizens**, and **Internet Heroes**) is available in the annex.

Looking ahead

Future challenges and opportunities

The regulatory and strategic framework related to media literacy in Romania is still underdeveloped. This will continue to constitute a crucial challenge in the years to come. Substantiating this observation, the research (and particularly the interviews) revealed a limited public awareness of the existing legal framework and institutional roles vis-a-vis country-level media literacy responsibilities.

The above is likely linked to the fact that existing regulations and strategies do not directly address the subject of media literacy though connected themes. Media education, digital skills, digital technology, and artificial intelligence, among others, do appear on the policy agenda to varying extents (primarily through the policy agenda of the **Ministry of Education**). These overlapping policy priorities, as related to media education and digital skills, can represent important entry points from which to develop a clearer media literacy agenda at the policy level in the future. This was echoed by the stakeholders consulted, who stressed the need to develop a national strategy for media education. Responding to this need, the **National Audiovisual Council** intends to develop such a strategy with the comprehensive participation of relevant stakeholders.

Rapidly evolving technology and the diversification of media consumption platforms intensify the challenges around raising media literacy levels. Compared to the needs of the population, existing media literacy initiatives remain insufficient. This is particularly true for at-risk and hard-to-reach target groups. While the **Ministry of Education** can be seen to implement relatively extensive interventions with a large segment of the population at national level these interventions are focused solely on targeting school-age children and youth, as well as teachers. Initiatives targeting other groups (such as at-risk groups or working-age adults) are generally not organised, or supported, at the policy level.

The Romanian country research further suggests that, while existing media literacy projects strive for high impact, a series of challenges make this difficult to achieve in practice for civil society organisers and other organisers of media literacy initiatives. This includes implementing organisations reporting limited reach and uncertainty of the continuity of programs and initiatives in the absence of centralized initiatives and allocation of resources by state authorities.

Regarding monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, these appear generally well-defined across the examined initiatives, but certain requirements are needed at the initiative design stage to ensure clear performance indicators at the project level from the onset of new initiatives.

2.7 Spain

Country context

The media literacy landscape in Spain has evolved slowly in recent years. Spain is a relatively good performer on basic digital skills, with 64% of people having at least basic digital skills, compared to EU average of 54%[341]. However, the percentage of people with basic digital skills has not changed much since 2016. Spain is unlikely to achieve the EU's target for 80% of the population achieving basic digital skills by 2030.

Since 2019, the Spaniards have consumed more digital content than before – with 93.3% consuming some type of digital content in 2023. This increase, together with the spread of misinformation through digital channels, is a concern as levels of media literacy in Spain (particularly among young and elderly groups) are not optimal.[342] In response to the increase of misinformation, including during COVID19, fact-checking organisations have emerged in Spain to combat misinformation. They offer training, awareness-raising activities and are developing of new technologies to prevent fake news and scams.

In recent years, the regulatory landscape for media literacy has evolved considerably with the introduction of two important legislation pieces that aim to strengthen media literacy in Spain: the **General Audiovisual Communication** law, which entered into force in 2022 and the **Organic Law of Education (LOE)** of 2020.

Moreover, in June 2024, the Spanish government published the Draft law for online child safety, which included a wide strategy for media literacy in the education system encompassing teachers, students and parents[343]. A month later, in July 2024, the Government subsequently announced a forthcoming law related to fighting disinformation[344]. The latter law would aim to bring Spain in line with the European Media Freedom Act, but may also address media literacy campaigns more widely.

Policy and regulatory context

This section provides an overview of the leading policy and regulatory actors in Spanish media literacy, as well as the key legislation and policies they are responsible for enforcing. Subsequently, a brief assessment of the strength of the overall national media literacy framework is presented.

The regulatory landscape for media literacy in Spain has slowly changed in recent years, and it continues to evolve to ensure the implementation of a comprehensive national regulatory and policy framework.[345] The following public authorities are responsible for regulating media literacy policy at national level.

> The **Ministry of Digital Transformation and Public Service** (formerly the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Digital Transformation) oversees the preparation and modification of laws on audiovisual matters. It manages state-level audiovisual communication services, updates the state registry for audiovisual communication service providers, promotes specialist audiovisual programmes and prepares annual reports about the audio-visual sector.

> The **National Commission of Markets and Competition (CNMC),** created in 2013,[346] together with the **Ministry of Digital Transformation and Public Service**, regulates media literacy in Spain from an audiovisual angle. It oversees the production of a report on media literacy measures every three years, in line with the requirements stated of Article 33 of the European Audiovisual Media Services Directive (2018/1808) (AMSD).[347] The CNMC is currently working on the media literacy measures report of 2024, which follows the Commission guidelines on the scope of the Member States' reports regarding the measures implemented for the promotion and development of media literacy.[348]

> The Ministry of Education and Professional Training together with National Institute of Educational Technologies and Teacher Training, the National Centre for Curricular Development and the autonomous bodies at regional level in charge of education[349] are the public bodies in charge of regulating and implementing education policies including the organic law (see below) which includes media literary as core competence.

There are other actors, described below, indirectly regulating and contributing to media literacy policy in Spain. These are responsible for various intersecting policy areas, including data protection, combating misinformation, online harms and internet safety and knowledge generation around technology and society.

> The Spanish **Agency for Data Protection** is the supervisory national authority with all relevant powers foreseen by the **GDPR**.[350]

> The **Forum Against Disinformation Campaigns** in National Security was constituted in 2022. This forum brings together civil society in the fight against disinformation.[351] The Forum plenary comprises six people representing the **General State Administration** and ten representing civil society organisations.

> The Spanish **Public Prosecutor's Office** ensures all the criminal activities under the Criminal Code are prosecuted, including cyber-bullying and cyber-sexual harassment.

> **ONTSI** is the **National Observatory of Technology and Society**, and generates knowledge for public policies (as well as for business and citizen interventions) on technological developments and its different impacts on the economy, employment, public services, rights, security, quality of life and equality among people. The observatory supports the **CNMC** in producing a media literacy report every three years as stated in the **European Directive 2018/1808**.

> **Red.es** is the driving force behind the Digital Agenda in Spain, developing digitalisation and technological development initiatives and projects in the fields of economy, public services, citizenship, infrastructure and the internationalisation of companies. Since its creation in 2002, Red.es has managed projects from a number of EU-funds and oversees funding to various media literacy initiatives.[352]

The main legislation in Spain around media literacy is the **General Audiovisual Communication** law, which entered into force in 2022 and the **Organic Law of Education (LOE)** of 2020.

The **General Law on Audiovisual Communication** (2022) sets the general principles of audiovisual communication in Spain. Article 10 of this law is dedicated to media literacy, defined as *'developing competencies, knowledge, skills and attitudes of understanding and critical appraisal that enable citizens of all ages to use the media effectively and safely, to access and critically analyse information, to discern between facts and opinions, recognise fake news and disinformation processes and create audiovisual content responsibly and safely'.*[353] In its point 1, the law states that all actors involved *'shall take measures for the acquisition and development of media literacy skills in all sectors of society and shall periodically evaluate the progress made'.* This law transposes the **AMSD** to Spanish national law.[354]

At the autonomous region level, some regions, including Andalusia, Catalunya and Valencia, have their own regional Audiovisual laws. These comply to the general **Law on Audiovisual Communication** and are implemented by the regional audiovisual councils which are independent regulatory bodies focused on maintaining rights, freedoms, constitutional values, and legal standards in audiovisual media. The **Audiovisual Council of Andalusia** has been operational for over 20 years. Media and digital literacy is a strategic priority for them and included in Article 10 of the Andalusian Audiovisual law[355] which states the right to media and information literacy with a pedagogical character and the role the audiovisual council plays in it.

The **Audiovisual Council of the Valencian Community (CACV)** ensures that audiovisual and advertising practices comply with regulations set **Law 10/2018**.[356] Article 4 of this law, 'purposes and principles of action,' focuses on promoting media literacy in the population. It highlights providing children with resources to understand media language and develop critical thinking about media content. The law also points out to collaboration with various organisations to increase social awareness on topics like gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, and youth.

Media literacy education in Spain can be traced back to the 1980s when mass media emerged in Spain. Initiatives such as **Press and School Programme** of the **Ministry of Education**, focused on incorporating audiovisual media into both formal education and informal learning. Since then, media and information literacy in Spain has been predominantly focused on technology and teaching how to use ICT tools. However, it was only in 2006 that media literacy was included in Spanish education law. The first instance of media literacy included under the education regulatory framework in Spain can be traced back to the **Organic Law of Education** (2006), which included the definition and basic competencies related to media literacy. The new **Organic Law of Education of 2020**[357] includes the following modifications related to media and digital literacy.

› It states that the *'educational system will guarantee the full inclusion of students in the digital society and the learning of responsible consumption and critical and safe use of digital media and respectful of human dignity... particularly with the respect and guarantee of personal and family privacy and the protection of personal data'.*

› It strengthens the definition and scope of digital education; it states that digital education *'should be an objective at all educational stages'.* Digital competences include the safe, healthy, sustainable, critical and responsible use' of digital technologies for learning, work and participation in society, the creation of digital content (including programming), security (including digital well-being and cybersecurity-related competences), issues related to digital citizenship, privacy, intellectual property, problem-solving and computational and critical thinking.

› It highlights the need to break the gender digital gap.

› It states that all strategic plans of individual educational establishments should include a digital strategy.

To support educational establishments to develop their digital plans, the **National Institute of Educational Technologies and Teacher Training**, together with the autonomous regions, has developed a guidance document for *'Digital Plan in Schools'*.[358] It includes a proposal for the structure and elements to include in their digital plans following the European framework for digitally skills[359] and suggestions on the design and elaboration of the plan including multiple initiatives around digital training and literary. One of the multiliteracies projects[360] included in the guidance document aims to empower citizens to develop capacities for reflection, oral expression, critical thinking, and guarantees them full participation in digital society and knowledge.

Another important education law is the Royal Decree 243/2022[361] which establishes the minimum education requirements of the **Baccalaureate**. Electronic literacy, media literacy and innovative learning environments have been introduced to all bachelor degrees, and a new bachelor degree in science and technology has been included in the higher education offer in Spain.

Regarding teacher training, the last update to the framework on teaching digital competence[362] in 2022 and included in **Article 2 of the Organic Law of Education**, introduced some modifications in the competence area 6 on the development of digital competence of students, including teacher training for *'media literacy and the processing of information and data'*.

Assessment of the strength of the overall national ML framework

The Spanish national framework around media literacy has been prioritised in recent years with the introduction of the **General Law on Audiovisual Communication** and the introduction of enhanced digital and media literacy requirements in the latest educational legislation. However, stakeholders consulted noted some gaps in the current national framework including:

›

› **Strengthening teacher training**: Qualitative findings highlighted the importance of integrating media literacy in teacher training, which entails providing these skills to teachers during their undergraduate studies and through continuous professional development after qualification. This will mean further strengthening the professional development offer for teachers. Currently, teacher training, and particularly pre-service teacher training, has focused on technology in education and it includes limited considerations around critical thinking, digital literacy, combating misinformation and acknowledging the complexities of the digital age.[363]

› **Challenges around standardising media and information literacy content and providing comprehensive teacher training persist, with visible differences in training intensity and focus across educational levels and regions**. Some initiatives like IBERIFIER, Maldita.es and Newtral are providing training and resources to various groups, including educators, journalists, students, and seniors for combating disinformation and promoting media literacy. Making these a part of official teacher training opportunities should be considered in the future.

› **Integrate and collaborate more with current key players in the media literacy space to combat misinformation and enhance digital education and skills.** According to stakeholders, fact-checkers in Spain have played a crucial role during Covid-19 and they can continue to play an important role if more people know about their existence and how to use their services (e.g. fact-checking WhatsApp group offered by Maldita.es). Fact-checking organisations offer training, awareness raising and developing of new technologies to prevent fake news and scams. These can be offered to teachers, students and other relevant stakeholders. Moreover, fact checkers hold a lot of information about fake news and disinformation in general that could be use in the future to improve the policy and regulatory framework in Spain around online harms and internet safety, misinformation, citizenship and education, technology etc.

The current state of media literacy

The current state of media literacy in Spain could be improved, digital skills among the population should be enhanced by further strengthening formal and informal education opportunities around digital and media literacy. Particularly among the most vulnerable groups (the elderly +65 years old and young people below 18 years old). In recent years there has been an increase in the consumption of digital content among Spaniards and many are concerned about the increasing levels of misinformation and fake news which affects their daily choices particularly around health and politics.

Spain is a relatively good performer on basic digital skills, with 64% of people having at least basic digital skills, compared to EU average of 54%.[364] However, the percentage of people with basic digital skills has not changed much in the last years. Between 2016 and 2022, the overall prevalence of basic digital skills increased by only 3 percentage points. According to current predictions[365], Spain is unlikely to achieve the EU's target for 80% of the population achieving basic digital skills by 2030. Despite stagnation in the number of people gaining basic digital skills, Spain's ICT graduates rose from 4% in 2022 to 4.8% of graduates in 2023. It places Spain above the EU average (4.2%) for the first time.[366] The percentage of ICT specialists in total employment has also increased in 2023, rising from 4.1% to 4.3% of the total number of people of working age, and is on the one of the top EU countries in terms of the percentage of female ICT experts, behind Germany and France.

Primary and secondary teachers in Spain perceived that little or no progress has been in the last years to enhance media literacy and education. According to a 2021 study, 47% of surveyed teachers stated that little progress has been made in media literacy over the last five years.[367] The study also highlights that Spain is the second country in Europe where there is most concern about misinformation (82%). It seems to be lagging, especially in terms of the development of initiatives by public administrations, in comparison with other European countries. Qualitative evidence also suggest that media literacy needs to be enhanced in Spain – particularly critical thinking. New and upcoming AI technologies will continue to appear and one of the ways to combat misinformation generated by these new technologies is to educate people on how to think critically to question and verify information they read and find online but also use fact-checking providers to support with the information verification process.

Qualitative findings further highlighted the vulnerability of two social cohorts when it comes to media literacy and misinformation – the elderly (+65 years old) and young people (below 18 years old):

'The elderly are not a native digital group, being born after the internet was created. They are more susceptible to believe every information that comes from something that looks like a newspaper/radio – a website with a photo is enough. They are more likely to believe fake news and be target for scams.'

Media literacy stakeholder, Spain

According to the latest **ONTSI** report, 93.3% of Spaniards consume some type of digital content. This number has substantially increased since 2019, when there were the confinements during the global pandemic. In 2022, around 45% of Spaniards have paid for digital content, and in particular people above 35 years old that pay more for audiovisual, musical and educational content. Linked to the increase in consumption of digital content in recent years, disinformation and the current state of media literacy among adults have become an important topic of national debate.

According to a survey carried out by the **National Institute of Statistics** in 2021 58,7% found dubious information on the internet and only half checked its veracity.[368] The most willing to verify information were those under 34 years old, with percentages close to 60%. The over-65s, the age group that said they had found the least suspicious content, also have the lowest percentage when it comes to checking whether something is true. A content analysis of all the checks made by the fact-checking platforms **Maldito Bulo** and **Newtral** during the month of the Covid-19 first year anniversary (March 14 to April 14, 2021) showed that the fake news that were spreading the most are related to the political debate, beyond the pandemic. Plus, the most disseminated content related to the health crisis are linked to vaccines and the vaccination process.[369]

According to qualitative evidence, tech platforms are playing an important role in the media literacy landscape in Spain by funding educational programmes, awareness campaigns on misinformation and media literacy as well as facilitating knowledge exchange at European and international level (see section 2). Stakeholders recommended that tech platform should continue to fund existing and future initiatives in Spain including initiatives by fact checkers to protect the spread of false information to protect society form harm. Moreover, tech platforms can strengthen their own personal data and information checking systems to help minimise the impact of misinformation in Spain and around the globe.

Wider landscape of media literacy initiatives

The Spanish media literacy landscape is shaped by initiatives at the EU, national and regional levels, reflecting a dynamic interplay between different layers of governance.

As stated in Article 6 of the **General Law on Audiovisual Communication**, public authorities, audiovisual media service providers, non-for-profit organisations, schools etc. should contribute to the media literacy of citizens. Article 10 states that the competent national audiovisual authority shall draw up a report every three years on the measures taken and their effectiveness. For the last media literacy report, published in 2022, 85 state-wide audiovisual service providers were contacted and 24 them gave information on their planned and ongoing media literacy initiatives. A total of 56 media literacy initiatives were recorded.[370] For example, the AMI Minds Awards that recognise educational initiatives which make an improvement in the development of competencies related to MIL. The report does not include media literacy measures taken by regional audiovisual media service providers, by audiovisual communication service providers, public administrations and other types of entities such as non-profit organisations. However, the aim is that future reports will include all media literacy initiatives.[371]

There are several types of organisations that have an important role in fostering media literacy in Spain:

›   **Fact-checking organisations**. In Spain, there are three independent platforms – Maldita, Newtral and F-verifica that all combat disinformation and promoting media literacy by monitoring political discourse and fact-checking. According to the qualitative evidence, fact-checking organisations are working closely with tech companies, media and educational organisations and regional public authorities in the development and implementation of educational programme and trainings, awareness raising and developing of new technologies to prevent fake news and scams and improve media literacy among citizens.[372]

›   **Non-for-profit organisations working in education and child protection**. Organisations in Spain at national and regional level work in promoting and enhancing children rights and protecting them against societal harms including prohibited online content and misinformation. They work on this through activities such as influencing and advising national and regional authorities to improve policies, implementing educational programmes, raising awareness through campaigns and community activities.

›   **School libraries**. Some schools are modernising their school libraries to keep up with the media and digital literacy developments. They are important for students to foster critical reading and digital literacy skills, offering integrated learning experiences and access to quality educational resources.[373]

›   **Communication schools at higher education institutions**. Media literacy has always been linked to technical degrees related to ICT. However, communication degrees in Spain also include media literacy aspects and these can be enhanced by communication school representatives at higher education institutions. Thus, communication schools play a crucial role in introducing modern teaching and learning practices around media literacy by contributing to the development of responsible communication professionals that understand how to identify misinformation and the risks associated with it.[374]

On top of the state audiovisual providers, regional public bodies, regional media providers, foundations and NGOs – including fact-checking organisations carry out a wide range of media literacy initiatives. Some initiatives are privately funded by banks (such as BBVA and Caixa), technology and media companies (such as Google, Meta, and Disney) and publicly funded.

> At the regional level, the **Audiovisual Council of Andalusia** has implemented media literacy initiatives including the touring bus campaign 'PasadelBulo, y navega seguro' moving from town to town to equip citizens with media literacy skills covered in the report's initiative annex. The Council also runs an annual school award and aims to strengthen audiovisual literacy skills in the educational centres of the Andalusian community, provide media literacy workshops for the elderly together with Andalusian universities, and information sessions such as *'Andalusia influye'* in which social media influencers were invited to share how they use social media channels responsibly.

> There are several **education and media foundations and NGOs** in Spain working on media literacy in Spain. One of them is FAD Juventud – a private foundation whose purpose is to improve the well-being and quality of life of young people. It runs several European and national media literacy initiatives including an educational programme called 'connected education'[375] – ongoing for three years. In that programme they have around 60,000 direct beneficiaries including teachers, families and students.

> **Fact-checking organisations**. They develop their own educational programmes and organise awareness raising activities around media literacy (see Fakenews Bus in section 2), but also work closely with tech companies, media and educational organisations and regional public authorities in the development and implementation of educational programme and trainings, awareness raising and developing of new technologies.

Would you like to learn more about specific initiatives on the ground?

For a closer look at a set of Irish media literacy initiatives with potential for transferrable learning, check out the options below:

Initiative 1: The Fakenews Bus: the route against disinformation (El buloBus: la ruta contra la desinformacion) *– a mobile disinformation campaign that toured around 19 towns in Spain*

Initiative 2: Surfear la red (Surfing the net) *– an umbrella educational programme encompassing critical thinking skills, digital leisure training and online safety support for various ages and audiences*

Initiative 3: PasaDelBulo, y navega seguro (Don't mind the fake news, and surf safely) *– an awareness-raising campaign targeting vulnerable audiences*

Looking ahead
Future challenges and opportunities

Issues that are likely to be important in relation to the development of media literacy in Spain include:

> Strengthening formal and informal education opportunities around digital and media literacy to improve basic and more advance digital skills among its population. It should particularly focus on narrowing the existing media literacy divide among the elderly and young people. Formal education can be enhanced by reinforcing teacher training around key digital competences and ensuring teachers develop adequate media literacy content in their subjects (following the new requirements of the **Organic Law of Education**). Informal education is also crucial – particularly for the elderly. It would be important to offer media literacy education and tools via educational programmes offered by different stakeholders (see sections above), best practice exchange activities, and awareness raising activities.

❯ Addressing the disruptive nature of technological advances – such as AI. The consumption of digital content in Spain increased substantially during COVID-19, and so did the spread of fake news. New and upcoming AI technologies will continue to contribute to the spread of disinformation in the less regulated spaces which could undermine public trust in news and information. Thus, it is important that future generations are better educated in understanding new technologies and to think critically so they can question news and information produced by AI and future content-generated technologies that takes time to regulate and control. Spain will need to further educate its population on how to think critically to question and verify information they read and find online.

❯ On top of strengthening critical thinking, the role of fact-checking services should be further promoted and encouraged via formal and informal educational programmes, and awareness raising activities. Using fact-checking providers can ease the process of verifying information Spaniards consume daily. They can also provide useful information against falsehoods in Spanish, whether through messages, videos, photographs or statements. In this way, it helps to broaden citizens' knowledge and deepen their understanding of society, to contribute to improved public debate and informed decision-making.

2.8 United Kingdom

Policy and regulatory context

The UK does not have a nationwide statutory media literacy policy, but media literacy has seen increased commitment since the 2023 **Online Safety Act**, which gives a greater mandate to the regulator **Ofcom** to promote media literacy, and more weight to the **Department of Science, Innovation and Technology**'s '*Online Media Literacy Strategy*'. The country's approach to media literacy is underpinned by a strong focus on online safety.

UK governance and relationship with EU regulatory landscape since Brexit

The UK has a devolved system of government with four different legislatures and executives, each with a different range of powers. The **UK Parliament** and **UK Government** retain some powers across the whole of the UK, but the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish legislatures and executives can make their own laws in several policy areas. Broadcasting is governed at a UK level, but powers over other areas such as arts, culture and education are devolved. Media literacy is a devolved issue, so the '*Online Media Literacy Strategy*' (see below) only extends directly to England, but the UK Government engaged with other executives in its preparation.

Since the UK left the European Union, it is not subject to EU regulation such as the **Digital Services Act** or the **AI Act** and interviewees suggested that these laws have limited influence over UK policymaking. However, particularly in the areas of platform regulations, illegal and harmful content, the **Online Safety Act** is aligned with the EU's **Digital Services Act**. Maintaining alignment and consistency between legislations presents both a challenge and an opportunity. By ensuring harmonisation in their respective legislations, both parties can facilitate cross-border collaboration and information-sharing, thus enhancing the effectiveness of measures aimed at combating misinformation and harmful content.

Joint action against these shared threats not only strengthens individual efforts but also fosters a cohesive and resilient digital ecosystem across Europe. Harmonisation with EU regulations remains important because it promotes a level playing field for businesses operating within the wider European market, facilitating ease of doing business, ensuring smoother cross-border transactions and trade relations. Harmonised standards also drive collaboration and innovation by providing a common framework for businesses, policymakers, and civil society organizations to work towards shared objectives.

The challenge for the UK and the EU will be in navigating a potentially diverging regulatory landscape while preserving alignment on fundamental principles of media literacy and digital safety. Therefore, ongoing dialogue and cooperation will be essential to address emerging challenges and seize opportunities for collective action effectively and coherently.

Media freedom

Media freedom in the UK is a mixed picture. According to the **Centre for Media Pluralism and Freedom** 2022 report on media pluralism in the UK, the indicator on '*Protection of Freedom of Expression*' just made it into the low risk category (33%). Protections include the UK's ratification of international standards, including the **European Convention on Human Rights** and the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights**, as well as the **UK Human Rights Act** of 1998, which offers statutory freedom of expression protection.

The UK was ranked 26 out of 180 countries in the '*2023 RSF World Press Freedom Index*', falling into the 'satisfactory' category (the second highest after 'good'). RSF expressed concerns about the UK's restrictive political climate and legislative proposals which risk criminalizing investigative journalism. The limitations of recently introduced anti-SLAPP legislation, which only covers cases involving economic crime, and accusations of political influence over the BBC, have also caused concern among industry and commentators in the UK. In contrast, the **Freedom House** '*2023 Freedom on the Net report*' rated the UK's internet environment as 'free,' with the fifth highest ranking of the 70 countries it covered.

Relevant regulation

The 2023 **Online Safety Act (OSA)** aims to take a 'zero-tolerance approach' to protecting children, while empowering adults to have more control over what they see online and incorporates media literacy duties. The Act makes **Ofcom** (already the UK's communications regulator) the UK's online safety regulator and updates its statutory media literacy duties (established via the **Communications Act 2003**) to include taking tangible steps to prioritise the public's awareness of and resilience to mis- and disinformation online, enabling users to establish the reliability, accuracy and authenticity of content. **Ofcom** must produce a media literacy strategy by October 2024, to set out how it will meet its existing and new obligations.

Aside from the **OSA**, the new digital imprints regime, introduced by the **Elections Act 2022**, aims to increase the transparency of digital political advertising (including artificial intelligence-generated material).

Approach to artificial intelligence

The UK Government is taking what it described as a 'pro-innovation' approach to become 'an AI superpower' when it announced the publication of a **White Paper on AI** in March 2023. A **House of Lords** inquiry into large language models and generative AI found, however, that '*the Government has recently pivoted too far towards a narrow focus on high-stakes AI safety,*' and called for a rebalance '*involving a more positive vision for the opportunities and a more deliberate focus on near-term risks.*'

The **Department of Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT)** is the lead government department on artificial intelligence. It is part of the **Defending Democracy Taskforce**[376] which has a mandate to protect the democratic integrity of the UK from threats of foreign interference, including from disinformation and digitally manipulated content. The threat to democracy from artificial intelligence was discussed at the UK-hosted global **AI Safety Summit** in November 2023.

Media literacy delivery

Within government, **DSIT** takes the lead on media literacy outside formal education and is the 'home' department for the **Online Media Literacy Strategy** (see below). The **Department for Education (DfE)** provides statutory guidance on promoting media literacy in schools and resources and training for teachers in England, as do its counterparts in devolved nations. The **Home Office** and **Cabinet Office** also have limited involvement through initiatives like the **Defending Democracy Taskforce**, and the '*Don't Feed the Beast/SHARE*' checklist[377]. The **Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities** plays a role in cascading media literacy resources down to the local level. **Children's Commissioners** in England, Scotland and Wales also play a role in connecting communities and policymakers. Focusing on digital literacy, they have been advising on policy development as well as addressing communities and providing guidelines.

The UK Government published its **Online Media Literacy Strategy**[378] in July 2021. It is aligned with the OSA and has a strong focus on online safety and the need to tackle online harms. However, the **Media Literacy Knowledge and Skills Framework** that it outlines is wider ranging, stressing the importance of understanding the online environment, being able to critically analyse content, and how to engage positively online, as well as focusing on associated risks. The overarching objective of the strategy is: *'supporting organisations to undertake media literacy activity in a more coordinated, wide-reaching, and high-quality way.'* It aims to do this by:

> Setting out a strategic direction for the future of media literacy in the UK.

> Ensuring a coordinated approach to media literacy activity.

> Addressing key gaps within the media literacy landscape.

> Reducing barriers and creating opportunities for organisations undertaking media literacy activity.

Assessing and enhancing the funding landscape is another key priority, to ensure a *'diverse spectrum of funders'* as one interviewee put it, including considering the best way for tech companies to fund media literacy, and how to bring other funders into the fold: *'we need a diverse spectrum of different funders.'*

As part of the strategy, two grant schemes have been set up, the **Programme Fund** and the **Taskforce Fund**; both of which place an emphasis on robust evaluation of funded projects. Findings from these evaluations will be shared across the sector to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of future media literacy initiatives and will inform policymaking in this area. The **Programme Fund** is supporting 13 media literacy projects focused on tackling the challenges of evaluation, reaching vulnerable users, and building resilience to mis- and disinformation. A **Media Literacy Taskforce** aims to formulate ways to extend the provision of media literacy to hard-to-reach citizens, including supporting organisations to pilot new methods of delivering media literacy through local communities. At the time of writing, it is expected that the structures around media literacy will continue to evolve as the new Labour government, elected in July 2024, makes decisions about its own approach to media literacy.

The role of Ofcom

Ofcom regulates the TV, radio and video on demand sectors, as well as fixed line telecoms, mobiles, postal services and the airwaves. **Ofcom** produces a compulsory **Broadcasting Code** for TV and radio broadcasters. There are separate rules for video-on-demand services, which include TV catch-up, online film services and libraries of archive content.

Ofcom has a duty to promote and carry out research into media literacy, under the **2003 Communications Act** and extended in the **OSA** (see above). It published its approach to online media literacy in December 2021, outlining three policy challenges:

> Media literacy is fundamental to inclusion, and it is necessary to support those not currently online or only online in a limited way.

> Media literacy is fundamental for people being able to live safe and savvy lives online, and we all need the ability to and habit of critically assessing what we see online.

> Media literacy is as much about what platforms and services do as it is what users do, and it is important that platforms design their environments as places where media literacy is intentionally supported.

Specific government efforts to combat mis- and disinformation

The Government's **Counter Disinformation Unit** was set up in 2019 to: *'understand disinformation narratives and attempts to artificially manipulate the information environment to ensure that the government understands the scope and reach of harmful mis- and disinformation and can take appropriate action.'* It specifically focuses on content targeted at UK audiences that poses a risk to public health, public safety or national security. In February 2022, the UK **Government Communication Service (GCS) created the UK Government Information Cell** in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It works with a range of government departments as well as **NATO, EU** and **Five Eyes** allies, to identify and expose Russian disinformation, and to create content to bolster the morale and confidence of the Ukrainian people.

The GCS has also created a toolkit called *'Resist'* aimed at supporting governments and communicators to reduce the impact of mis- and disinformation through strategic communications. However, the **Carnegie Trust** described the working of these bodies as *'opaque; there is no statutory basis nor any oversight.'*

Media literacy in the school curriculum

Media literacy fits into the national school curriculum in various places. Citizenship teaching, mandatory in maintained schools at key stages 3 and 4, aims to equip pupils with the skills and knowledge to explore political and social issues critically, weigh evidence, debate and make reasoned arguments. Citizenship includes coverage of media literacy topics such as safeguarding democracy and a free media, understanding the role of responsible journalism in democratic society, distinguishing fact from opinion, exploring freedom of speech, identifying mis-, dis- and mal-information and countering the effects of negative and harmful news, events and information.

'*Relationships, Sex and Health Education' (RSHE*) is mandatory in all schools**.** Pupils are taught about online relationships, the implications of sharing private or personal data (including images) online, harmful content and contact, cyberbullying and where to get help and support for issues that occur online. Pupils should learn how to recognise risks, harmful content and contact, and how to report issues. Pupils should develop a strong understanding of how data is generated, collected, shared and used online, for example, how personal data is captured on social media or understanding the way that businesses may exploit the data available to them. The **Department for Education** has produced '*RSHE teacher training modules'* 'online and media' and 'internet safety and harms' to support delivery.

In health education, under the topic of internet safety and harms, pupils should be taught about how advertising and information is targeted at them and how to be a discerning consumer of information online. They should understand the practices and implications of data sharing and commercial information harvesting, as well as online scams such as extortion or blackmail via fake websites or phishing. Pupils should learn how to be a discerning consumer of information online including understanding that information is ranked, selected and targeted by search engines, platforms and apps.

Strength of the overall ML framework

Overall, the media literacy landscape in the UK offers important starting points for media literacy practice, but its strength is also affected by some important limitations. The key considerations are summarised below.

Embedding media literacy in the **Online Safety Act**, with **Ofcom** responsible for its implementation, secures it a place in the policy agenda at a national level. It is formally oriented towards online safety (particularly disinformation and harm to children) because of this key focal point.

› Research on stakeholder views of the current media literacy framework in the UK recognises the importance of media literacy as a policy focus, but stakeholders and some of our interviewees said that the distribution of delivery for media literacy across different government departments has disadvantages because there is no single locus of coordination or responsibility. It also runs the risk of government initiatives to support media literacy being uncoordinated or duplicated.

› The **Online Media Literacy Strategy** does provide a useful starting point for coordination, however, and is recognised to be an ambitious commitment to improving media literacy. It identifies a range of challenges for media literacy based on stakeholder research and analysis of what is being delivered in the sector currently, which have provided a roadmap for subsequent interventions (e.g. by focusing funding on specific types of projects). Stakeholders have also recognised the opportunities offered to media literacy via other policy priorities – for example, via training to implement and support the digital skills framework.

› Media literacy provision in schools is widely considered among media literacy experts to be insufficient. The lack of a mandated media literacy curriculum and its piecemeal delivery across a range of subject areas means that the quality of ML delivery in schools is uncertain. There is no guarantee it reaches all children, and as an optional subject it can be squeezed out of the curriculum due to time pressures. Free programmes funded and/or delivered by outside organisations are useful, but still need time and space that teachers must organise. The impact of these programmes is also unclear. Overall, stakeholders clearly argue that a more well-defined place for media literacy in formal education is necessary. The current system is being supplemented by civil society, but this is not ubiquitous and can lead to widening inequalities in competences.

› Funding and evaluation both remain an ongoing challenge but have limited visibility in policy. Currently there is no legislative duty for platforms to conduct media literacy activities, for example. Stakeholders have argued that government could play a role in setting up a fund sourced through industry contributions, specifically for media literacy but administered independently. Projects funded by the government and **Ofcom** now require an evaluation component, which is helping to develop a clearer picture of what works and allows policymakers to refine their response (for example, in the next update to the **Online Media Literacy Strategy**).

› Barriers and inhibiting factors for the sector include the need for an independent coordinating body to bring media literacy efforts together and enable the sector to be more visible to itself, the need for stronger ownership of media literacy within government, which would help sustain it as a policy priority and encourage funding and investment in the sector, and the limited public profile and recognition of media literacy as a valuable skill, which limits public awareness of the importance of media literacy as a way of tackling individual and social challenges.

The current state of media literacy

As in many countries, there isn't a clear picture of media literacy levels in the UK, and because the country is no longer included in EU rankings, it is hard to make comparisons with the EU context in terms of measurements that do exist. However, significant insights can be drawn from **Ofcom**'s research.

Media literacy levels

The UK is ranked 13th out of 41 countries in the **Open Society Institute** Sofia's '*European Media Literacy Index 2023*', which attempts to measure societies' vulnerability to disinformation based on several indicators on media freedom, education, trust and new forms of participation. (Note that it is thus not actually an indicator of media literacy levels per se).

Media consumption practices

The UK's media consumption practices are in a state of transition and show great variation between young and old. The UK still has very strong news brands and older generations still have strong connections with those brands, showing more traditional news habits than in some markets. Younger people, however, are receiving news from a wide variety of social networks and sources.

According to the '*2023 Digital News Report*' from the **Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism**, 74% of people in the UK access news online, compared with 52% on TV and 14% in print. **Ofcom**'s 2023 '*News Consumption*' survey found similar figures for online news access, reporting that 68% of UK adults use online sources for news, although it found that a higher proportion of adults (70%) use TV for news. Both surveys found that **BBC News** reaches the largest audiences, both online and offline.

The '*Digital News Report*' found that 38% of respondents in the UK used social media to access news (less than the average of 53% across the 46 markets studied) and 20% reported sharing news via social, messaging or email platforms. **Ofcom** found that 47% of UK adults used social media for news, with **Facebook** the most used platform, reaching 30% of adults – although this is less than in 2019 when it reached 35%. On the other hand, **TikTok** has been growing in popularity as a source of news, reaching 10% of UK adults, an increase from 1% in 2020. Among the very young, 28% of children aged 12-15 used **TikTok** as a news source in 2022 (up from 22% in 2012), and 29% used Instagram (no increase).

One interviewee commented that *'there is a sense that a lot of people are very confused – by the amount of news that they get, by all the perspectives they see.'*

Critical understanding of media

Ofcom's **Media Use and Attitudes** research provides valuable insights into media literacy competences in the UK among adults, and among children and their parents. The 2023 report indicated some positive signs that media literacy was growing among adults (aged 16+):

> 60% of social media users surveyed were confident and able to identify a fake social media profile, an increase from 55% in 2021.

> 77% of internet users said they think about whether the information they find online is truthful, up from 73% in 2021.

> 80% of internet users surveyed felt confident that they could recognise advertising online

> Two-thirds of social media users were confident and able to recognise paid partnership advertising on social media.

> 87% of internet users were aware of at least one way in which companies can collect information about people based on what they do online

However, less than half of search engine users (46%) were confident and able in identifying paid-for results returned by **Google** searching. This leaves a significant proportion (39%) with misplaced confidence in their ability to interpret advertising in search results. This problem is compounded by a lack of engagement with media literacy among some audiences. According to **DSIT**, the factors which contribute to a lack of engagement include:

> Limited media literacy interventions targeting citizens who are outside formal education settings.

> Digital exclusion.

> People not thinking media literacy is relevant to their lives.

> People having overconfidence in their own media literacy capabilities.

> Limited awareness of how to access support or which resources to use.

Digital skills

According to the fourth edition of the '*Essential Digital Skills' (EDS)* research carried out by **Ipsos**, commissioned by **Lloyds Banking Group**, 84% of UK adults now have the Foundation Level of essential digital skills identified by the **Department for Education**. This is up from 80% in 2022.

However, a 2023 inquiry by the **House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee** found that basic digital skills are set to become the UK's largest skills gap by 2030 and called for a new digital inclusion strategy, stressing that digital exclusion affects millions of UK citizens because they do not have the connection, device or skills to get online.

Democratic (dis)engagement, trust and extremism

According to the 2024 **Edelman Trust Barometer**, the UK is now among the least trusting nations surveyed. For example, only 30% of people surveyed in the UK trust the government, and 66% believed that government regulators lack adequate understanding of emerging technologies to regulate them effectively. The UK had the lowest trust in media (31%) and was also one of only 2 of the 28 countries surveyed in which people didn't trust business.

The 2023 **Reuters Institute** '*Digital News Report'* also found that trust in news is falling, with 33% reporting that they trusted the news in the 2023 survey, down from 51% in 2015. This was low compared to many other countries – the UK's trust level was 33rd out of 46 countries surveyed. Researchers highlighted that public broadcasters such as the **BBC, Channel 4**, and **ITV** that are required to meet strict impartiality standards remain the most trusted news brands, but also that older people tend to have much stronger connections with these news brands than younger people do. A separate 2023 **Reuters Institute** study on trust in the news across four countries, and the UK, also showed that marginalised groups who did not feel represented in the media trusted media less. **YouGov** research in 2023 showed that trust in different news outlets tended to align with party political views, but also that news consumption and trust in different outlets tended to correlate – in other words, people tend to trust the news they consume (and vice-verse).

According to interviewees, lack of trust in journalism can partially be explained by increased political polarisation: people think the media is biased through ongoing divisive debates around politics and culture, and because of the news media's traditional connections with the elite. However, research[379] shows that the trend in the UK is towards fragmentation rather than polarisation, at least in terms of support for political parties. Brexit remains a divisive issue, although remainers and leavers now align less clearly to the different areas of the political spectrum. More important issues affecting the political landscape in the UK are the economy, housing and immigration, which often attract more agreement than disagreement among voters.

Concerns about misinformation and disinformation[380] circulating in the media, and particularly the role of platforms in facilitating this, are relatively longstanding and have had a particularly high profile since the Brexit referendum, the presidency of Donald Trump, and the Covid-19 pandemic. The explosion of generative AI technologies has also made misinformation a more potent threat in the online landscape, according to a recent **NewsGuard** review[381]. Preventing misinformation and online harm, including reducing terrorism-related content, is part of the rationale for the **Online Safety Ac**t. Referrals to **Prevent**, the government's deradicalisation programme, have grown since it was introduced in 2015; the current conflict in Israel and Gaza has been accompanied by a rise in anti-Muslim and antisemitic activity, which suggests this trend may continue.

Ofcom research shows that media users are relatively poor at identifying misinformation, suggesting that this intersection of media literacy skills and misinformation relating to extremism may be an important area of for training and skills development. According to practitioners, the recognised need to prevent this kind of extremism means that focusing on anti-radicalisation can be a good way to get funding for media literacy work. Our interviewees noted the importance of incorporating trusted voices into strategies for delivering media literacy and learning from innovative solutions adopted by other sectors that have faced similar challenges of trust, legitimacy and changing attitudes in a complex environment.

Vulnerability to misinformation

Interviewees felt that many people in the UK are aware of misinformation – or 'fake news' – but don't understand what it is, can't spot it, and might confuse it with perceptions of bias in the media. The 2022 **Ofcom** report[382] indicated that only 20% of media users could correctly identify signs of misinformation in online news sources they were presented with.

Ofcom's media literacy research considers two groups of children who may be considered vulnerable: those who have a health issue, condition or disability which impact or limit their daily activities, and/or those who are in households considered to be most financially vulnerable. In **Ofcom**'s 2022 Children's media use and attitudes survey, about one in five children surveyed had an impacting or limiting condition, and about three in ten families surveyed were classified as most financially vulnerable.

A 2021 **Internet Matters** report also stressed that vulnerable young people are more at risk online than those without vulnerabilities (such as long-term illness, communication difficulties, experience of care, mental health difficulties). (**Internet Matters** chairs the **UKCIS Vulnerable Users Working Group**)

Interviewees highlighted several groups as being particularly vulnerable to online harms: asylum seeker families, who are particularly concerned about financial scams and are struggling to identify these, children with additional needs who are struggling either due to access to resources or lower cognitive skills, and those with less education.

Interviewees, however, suggested that in fact everyone is vulnerable to different types of mis/disinformation and online harms, and it is important to keep in mind that everyone is at risk to a greater or lesser extent: *'We are starting from such a low base line [in terms of media literacy levels] that this is a universal need,'* commented one interviewee.

Wider landscape of media literacy initiatives

Overview of the UK media literacy sector

The media literacy sector in the UK is difficult to define, because there are so many entry points for interventions and such a wide variety of organisations involved, including civil society groups, online platforms, media houses, universities, corporations, and government bodies. **Ofcom**'s '*Media literacy initiatives*' library contains 123 entries, which is indicative of what is on offer in the UK. Interviewees stressed that improving coordination in the sector was a key priority, including identifying and scaling the initiatives that were working well and trying to prevent duplication.

Sector mapping carried out383 in advance of the launch of the 2021 *'Online Media Literacy Strategy'* found that children were the most frequently targeted group by media literacy interventions, either directly (through the children themselves: 37%), or indirectly (through their parents and carers – 11% – or teachers). This mapping also found that the most common types of organisations providing online media literacy initiatives were charities or foundations (32%), a finding echoed by interviewees. The most common issues addressed were privacy (58%) and mis/disinformation (51%), and the most common delivery methods were resources such as printable online guides, information pages, informational videos or games, although many initiatives also carried out workshops, campaigns and/or research.

A significant amount of work takes place in formal educational settings, with fewer interventions reaching adult and vulnerable populations. Some provision focuses on a particular type of media literacy (e.g. financial literacy, or digital skills), while other programmes are more general. A lot of programmes focus on online media literacy, including the skills to avoid various types of online harm.

The **BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation**) as the national broadcaster also plays a role in promoting media literacy through its various regional services and initiatives. It provides educational content on media literacy through platforms, such as **BBC Bitesize**, and runs initiatives like *'BBC Own It'*, aimed at supporting children and young people in navigating their online lives safely. Other media organisations contribute to the media literacy via partnerships or their own programmes focused on improving understanding of news industries (e.g. **The Guardian Foundation**'s' *NewsWise*',[384] **The Times and Sunday Times**' '*News Literacy Programme*',[385] or The **Economist Educational Foundation's** *'Topical Talk'*[386]).

Other impact actors include associations for specific areas of the curriculum (e.g. the **Association for Citizenship Teaching**, the **English and Media Association**, the **PSHE Association**), as well as regional associations that coordinate delivery in specific areas or with specific audiences (e.g. **Leeds Older People's Forum**, The **Student View**, **CWMPAS**, **South-West Grid for Learning**).

The mapping found that some target groups are under-represented, such as users whose first language is not English, and that those *'most vulnerable to online harms in general are often the most underrepresented in regard to provision of online safety and digital literacy provisions.'* In 2023, the government funded pilot studies to address unmet needs, including reaching neglected and vulnerable audiences, as well as evaluation studies.

The current sector faces an array of challenges, confirmed in recent **LSE** research for **DSIT** as well as by our interviewees:

Contextual challenges:

› The **changing media environment** – the fast pace of change in technologies, platform architectures, popularity of different apps, evolutions in media formats (e.g. the growth of imagery and short-form video vs text), as well as changes in the way users engage with different types of media, all make it very difficult for media literacy practitioners to keep up their own skills and to maintain a relevant and realistic media literacy curriculum.

› **Low levels of media literacy in general and low awareness of its importance** – Media literacy has a low public profile overall, the UK does not have a focal point during the year such as a media literacy week, and there is no formal national policy for media literacy, while government coordination on delivery is lacking. This means that there is little public discussion of media literacy unless it aligns with other current policy issues such as misinformation or online safety. The public may have certain foundational skills for navigating online media, but there is only limited understanding of the broader media literacy agenda.

› **Low levels of institutional trust**, including in the media – This issue makes effective media literacy interventions harder, because the media itself is not a trusted institution, and institutional voices in the media are also mistrusted. One interviewee commented: *'The general narrative in the UK is so problematic around technology and the internet and online safety that that fosters a sense of mistrust.'*

› **Hard-to-reach and vulnerable audiences** – Like other countries, audiences that have complex lives, more immediate priorities and are not part of formal educational settings are all very difficult to reach. They also need tailored and relevant media literacy interventions, which means general programmes are not always relevant.

Funding and evaluation challenges

› **Funding** – The reliance on charity and third sector organisations for delivery means that funding is essential, but funding in practice tends to be fragmented, short-term and favour novelty and the funder's priorities rather than supporting well-established programmes that have demonstrated their effectiveness over time. There is some central government funding, but long-term investment in programmes and evaluation is still lacking.

› **Evaluating long-term and societal level outcomes** – This is recognised as a critical challenge, due to the methodological challenge it presents as well as lack of funding for developing long-term, societal evaluation. Without this it means the claims for the societal value of media literacy are harder to substantiate.

› **Difficulties accessing proprietary data for delivery and evaluation** – Practitioners note that to both educate people about their online habits, and to evaluate changes in what people are doing online, they need access to data and often this is not available from platforms or other owners.

Sector-specific challenges

› **Definitions and framing of media literacy** – Media literacy does not have a clear definition or boundary in practice; this means it can be woven into other forms of engagement with target audiences (e.g. digital, health or financial literacy), but it also means it is hard to explain why it is important, what value it can add, and leads to fragmentation of the sector. The public policy emphasis on online harm, which could deter people from going online, is also perceived as limiting because it does not focus on the broader societal or citizenship benefits that media literacy can deliver.

› **Sector structure and coordination** – There is no central coordination or leadership for the media literacy sector in the UK, government delivery is less coordinated than it could be, and stakeholders feel that there is a lack of infrastructure to help them share best practice in delivery and evaluation. The lack of coordination also makes it difficult to identify funders, collaborators and partners for implementation.

› **Low levels of skill and expertise in evaluation** – Media literacy practitioners rarely have training in evaluation practices, which means evaluation is often of limited quality and cannot be generalised.

› **Quality-related issues** – The lack of a robust definition of media literacy and limited evaluation means there is no commonly accepted benchmark for ML quality and outcomes.

Overall assessment of the media literacy landscape

While media literacy work is carried out in the UK by dedicated practitioners, the lack of coordination and opacity of the sector means that it is currently impossible to know the scale and scope of activity both overall, and in relation to societal priorities. Moreover, as one interviewee noted, *'there is no shortage of societal challenges',* so that decisions about media literacy investment often end up being about where to *'place your bets',* as another interviewee described it.

Nonetheless, recent evolutions in the media and societal landscape underline previous findings and our interviewees confirmed that some of the longstanding concerns about the sector's capacity are still valid. In particular:

› The challenge for the sector to keep up with changing media technologies is magnified by the advent of generative AI, and its already widespread use online. This also reinforces the need for practitioners to be able to access user data for media literacy training and evaluation, so that the 'black' box' of online and misinformation architectures can be part of media literacy curricula.

› The problems of delivering media literacy in an environment of low institutional trust continue in the fractious political environment; political fragmentation continues, but this raises the issue that media that is not seen to be representative may still be trusted less.

› The current fiscal pressure that the UK government is facing means that public funding for media literacy at national, regional and local level will continue to be limited, which constrains the ability of practitioners to meet the needs of the many different populations that would benefit from media literacy training, as well as the amount of investment available for evaluation studies.

› The policy emphasis on online safety now enshrined in the **Online Safety Act**, in combination with high-profile media stories about vulnerable children being harmed and extremist content circulating, may discourage people from going online and make it more difficult to find funding for programmes focused on the creative, participatory and citizenship elements of media literacy. For example, the (previous Conservative) Government issued guidance for the use of mobile photos in schools that backs headteachers in prohibiting the use of mobile phones throughout the school day, reflecting concerns of parents about the amount of time their children spend online.

› Low trust may also make it more difficult to persuade training participants of the positive aspects of media.

› The current economic situation and the ongoing challenge of the digital divide both suggest that the range of hard-to-reach audiences with complex lives will remain an important focus and significant challenge for media literacy delivery.

› The ongoing lack of quality-assured evaluation practices that demonstrate the value of the sector also undermines media literacy's legitimacy, both among policymakers and in sectors that would be helpful partners for delivery (e.g. education).

Would you like to learn more about specific initiatives on the ground?

For a closer look at a set of UK media literacy initiatives with potential for transferrable learning, check out the options below:

Initiative 1: Newsguard – *combating disinformation through the use of embedded tools that rate the quality and authenticity of online news*

Initiative 2: Be Internet Legends – *an educational programme targeted at school children aged 7-11*

Initiative 3: Be Internet Citizens – *addressing current gaps in digital citizenship education for children 13+*

Initiative 4: Experience AI – *an educational programme that offers resources on artificial intelligence and machine learning for teachers and their students*

Looking ahead

Future challenges and opportunities

The UK, particularly London, is known as a global hub for technology and innovation. It also has a significant influence in the global media and entertainment industry, producing content across various platforms. By leveraging these influences, the country can drive industry-led initiatives to promote media literacy and responsible content creation. It can also lead to innovative solutions and cross-sectoral cooperations that can serve as a good example for European stakeholders. Tech providers hold a pivotal role in this endeavour. They can actively contribute by:

› Developing transparent algorithms: prioritising transparency in algorithmic processes, and adjusting them to mitigate biases and harm, can enhance user trust in online platforms.

› Investing in Media Literacy Tools: supporting the development and dissemination of media literacy tools can empower users in critically analysing and evaluating digital content.

› Enhancing privacy protection measures: robust privacy protection measures will safeguard user data and address privacy concerns associated with digital media consumption.

› Facilitating cross-sector collaborations: collaborations between tech companies, educational institutions, government agencies, and civil society organizations can harmonise approaches and create comprehensive media literacy initiatives.

The **Online Safety Act** provides a clear place for media literacy as it relates to online activity, and the fact that **Ofcom** has responsibility for ensuring it is delivered is an opportunity to reinforce the perceived importance of media literacy, at least in this area. **Ofcom** is also reviewing and updating its 2021 media literacy strategy to ensure it meets the requirements of the Act. This provides an additional opportunity to think through how more and better media literacy might be delivered. **Ofcom** now also have an obligation to report on the progress they make, which offers the possibility that more consistent monitoring of media literacy delivery will exist in the future.

Nonetheless, challenges in the wider landscape for media literacy remain:

› The current lack of institutional trust may not change in the short-term. However, the outcome of the national election in July 2024 may offer a moment of stabilisation and an opportunity for proposing new initiatives to support media literacy.

› The policy focus on online safety and misinformation is unlikely to change given that the **Online Safety Act** has now moved into law. On the one hand, this provides a clear focus for media literacy. On the other, it may mean funding for interventions is focused on a narrow range of activities and neglects the broader media literacy agenda. This may also impact on the potential for media literacy to contribute to positive societal outcomes.

› There is recognition that reaching vulnerable audiences is crucial, but the pilot studies that the government has funded in this area show that to do this effectively is a complex undertaking that would need considerable coordination and ongoing funding.

› At the country-level, funding and funding cycles will remain an issue, not least because there are so many needs for interventions and media literacy funding will always compete with other priorities, which can change from year to year.

› Overall, the challenges for media literacy are systemic and interconnected rather than individual. On the one hand, this means that several issues could be resolved through a small number of changes; on the other, the complexity of the sector means that it is always evolving and solutions that work at one point may not be so effective at a later date.

Challenges posed to the sector by generative AI

There is limited evidence on exactly how generative AI is being used in the UK, but anecdotal evidence suggests it is being widely used professionally, in education, and for entertainment. For example, the UK Government recently published a *'Generative AI Framework for HMG'*[387] which is guidance on using generative AI safely and securely for civil servants and those working in government organisations, and a survey conducted by the **Higher Education Policy Institute** found that 53% of undergraduates were using AI to generate material for work that they would be marked on.[388]

There is potential for generative AI to be used to support wider literacy efforts,[389] but interviewees for this study were not confident that the media literacy sector was well-equipped to adapt to the impact of transformative technologies, and one described keeping up to date as *'an absolutely enormous challenge.'*

3.0
Conclusion

This report has examined the European media literacy landscape through case studies of a selection of European countries and feedback from European media literacy practitioners. Whilst this report is not a comprehensive mapping of media literacy actions and trends across Europe this final chapter summarises some of the main themes and observations that have arisen from this research. This includes:

› A synthesis of the media literacy landscape that was reported through the country case studies, including common trends that were observed across the different national contexts, including priority themes, types of interventions.

› It then builds on the results of this landscape to examine some of the common issues that are likely to underpin effective action going forward that can respond to complex and emerging media literacy challenges.

› Based on this it makes some high-level recommendations for consideration by media literacy stakeholders, including European and national authorities, practitioners, civil society, and media organisations.

3.1 Key trends in the European media literacy landscape

This section examines some of the main themes that emerged from the case study countries. As widely noted, media literacy captures a broad range of actions and topics. Furthermore, when reviewing the European and national landscapes for media literacy there is a significant diversity of national contexts, policy agendas, institutional relationships, and activities. As a result, this section does not claim to present a comprehensive mapping and synthesis of national activity. Nevertheless, within this context, the review noted the following important themes that are shaping current activities and actions in relation to media literacy:

› **Current policy agendas in relation to media literacy are being driven by media regulation agendas**. The agenda is promoting a range of actions that are predominantly focused on media supply side issues to protect and promote safe access to trustworthy digital media and information. From a media literacy perspective these actions are being supported by media literacy actions that raise awareness amongst users and give them associated information tools and user competencies to navigate different sources and platforms.

› In addition, the evidence suggests that media literacy dimensions are being incorporated into mainstream education curricula, primarily through **digital skills and online safety agendas, but without important elements.** The extent and depth to which media literacy dimensions were being integrated into curricula **or** training, as well as in professional development for teaching professionals was inconsistent and in most cases limited. There was also limited evidence of initiatives to support training and development for media professionals, including traditional journalists as well as new media content creators.

› In this context there appears to be a gap in relation to **broader critical media literacy** that supports the development of competencies and skills that enable empowered and active citizenship. The development of broader critical media literacy approaches will be an important element of any sustainable approach to media literacy in increasingly complex and evolving media literacy landscapes. There was some evidence of media literacy being connected with national citizenship education curricula initiatives. However, these initiatives include a diverse range of curricula that require further examination.

Across the countries reviewed for this exercise media literacy actions continue to be closely linked to the implementation of European media regulation measures and agendas. This includes previous activities that have been supported by media regulators and authorities at the national and regional levels as part of the **AVMSD**. Increasingly, this action is focused on embedding the **DSA** (or comparable measures in the case of the UK) with the associated focus on improving the quality, transparency, and access to verifiable information on social media and search platforms. However, as a relatively new regulatory framework, the extent to which this has translated into coherent national policy frameworks to promote and develop media literacy objectives, including competences, amongst users at the national level is less clear.

At the same time, policy makers and stakeholders are responding to concerns about a **significant breakdown in trust in media amongst European citizens**. The breakdown is set in the context of the proliferation of potential sources and is affecting the full media ecosystem, including 'traditional' print, radio and TV sources alongside social media channels. Across all the countries reviewed traditional sources continued to be the primary source of information for audiences. At the same time, social media was reported as an increasingly important source across all age groups and social segments. Whilst there was considerable scepticism about the accuracy of information on social media, traditional news sources were also not fully trusted, leaving a notable lack of sources that users could rely on. Furthermore, risks were also identified in relation to the behaviour of all types of users when engaging in different media, including across ages, education, or other social groups. Factors included:

›   The greater likelihood to access information through diverse social media sources amongst younger age groups in comparison to more traditional media and sources e.g. as reported in the French case study.

›   The likelihood of knowledge of how to verify different news sources, including in the examples with less well-developed national media literacy education frameworks, such as in Italy.

›   Foundational digital competencies and skills, including understanding of digital medias, which were more likely to lower in older age groups, e.g. as reported in Poland and Romania.

Policy and regulatory measures are being shaped by concern about mis- and disinformation, particularly on social media. The country case studies highlighted that social media users are concerned about the volume of misleading information that they were encountering online. Furthermore, policy makers and stakeholders were also concerned about the risk that manipulative and misleading information would foster social divisions, erode confidence in democratic institutions, and undermine open societies. The specific contexts for each of the countries reviewed for this exercise were diverse and patterns of mis- and disinformation are complex and rapidly evolving. Common themes and examples included:

›   Covid-19 and the proliferation of conspiracy theories across Europe in relation to the public health response, such as the origins of the pandemic, safety and motivations of vaccines, and legitimacy of social restrictions.

›   Disinformation campaigns linked to the Russian invasion of Ukraine which were present across Europe, but which were particularly acute in CEE countries that have targeted the legitimacy of domestic and European political institutions.

›   Misinformation and disinformation linked to anti-migrant politics, including the recent examples of misinformation that led to violent disturbances in Ireland, the UK, and disinformation campaigns targeting Ukrainian refugees.

›   Emerging trends in relation to the broad environmental agenda, including climate and energy security, and intersecting topics issues such as planning and active travel, that were observed in Poland as well as in the UK and Germany.

›   Political radicalisation and extremism, including long-standing concerns linked to radical Islamist and far right groups in the UK and France, as well as Germany, and associated counter-extremism policy responses.

The extent of national activities did vary. France has adopted a leadership role in relation to the **DSA** agenda, including the development of actions in advance of the **DSA** and subsequently a strong transposition of European regulations. Ireland has also adopted quite ambitious measures in response to the **DSA**, building on pre-existing media literacy measures that were linked to the **AVMSD**. This includes capacity building of stakeholders and partners, including civil society, education, and media organisations. This work was led by the national media regulator through the **Media Literacy Ireland** initiative and underpinned the **Be Media Smart** awareness raising campaign. In addition, in the UK, which is no longer party to the **DSA**, there is a relatively high level of convergence with European regulatory and policy frameworks through the domestic **Online Safety Act**.

The coherence of supporting national policy frameworks and actions was sometimes complicated by the range of stakeholders and agencies, including at regional or state levels, such as in the case of Spain and Germany. Furthermore, where the **AVMSD** and **DSA** have been transposed the extent of follow up actions fluctuates. For example, in Italy, whilst the **DSA** has recently been transposed, there has been limited follow-up action at the national level beyond recent support for targeted awareness raising activities. Similarly in Romania, the requirements of the **DSA** and broader European agendas have been recognised in national laws but have not yet resulted in a clear national policy framework. The Romanian and Polish cases also highlight the continued importance of existing legal frameworks, including protections for freedom of the press and criminal and penal codes in relation to harmful claims and threats.

In this context media literacy actions are increasingly situated as a supplementary strand of efforts to regulate or improve the quality of information on social media. In many cases media literacy has been linked to initiatives to equip users with tools or sources to verify information online, alongside targeted awareness-raising campaigns and activities, that have been supported by a range of actions by media regulators, media organisations, NGOs and other third parties. This has included measures to moderate and label content in line with the **DSA**, such as the examples of online safety codes as part of the **Online Safety and Media Regulation Act** in Ireland, as well as a range of fact-checking and verification initiatives and campaigns, including for example:

› **Objectif Désinfox** in France,

› *Demagog* in Poland

› The Bulgarian-Romanian **Observatory of Digital Media** activities

› **Factual by Funky Citizens** in Romania

› **Maldita, Newtral**, **F-verifica** and the *PasaDelBulo, y navega seguro* campaign in Spain

The review did highlight continued investment in media literacy education and training initiatives. In many cases, these activities continue to be supported by media regulators and media authorities in line with the expectations of the **AVMSD**. Activities were primarily focused on the development of media literacy competencies amongst users, typically young people. Activities included the development of curricula and learning resources and, in some cases, direct delivery of teaching and education activities. There were also some examples of initiatives focused on educator competencies and professional development. Many of these examples were developed and implemented by a range of NGOs with the support of public and private funding. Examples included:

› National educational initiatives and large programmes, such as **FLIMMO**,[390] **Internet ABC**[391] and **Klicksafe**[392] in Germany or the various initiatives supported by Google.org grants leveraging the **Be Internet Awesome** curriculum to offer resources that deal with a range of media literacy topics for school age children.

› Initiatives that offer teaching in schools or other educational settings, such as **Keyboard Fighters** (*Wojownicy Klawiatury*), workshops for schools organised by the **Geremek Foundation** and **Robert Schuman Foundation**[393] in Poland.

› Professional development and training initiatives, including for educators and librarians, such as the b programme in Italy, or training for journalists, that has been offered as part of fact-checking and observatory initiatives such as the **BROD** and **Maldita**.

› Targeted outreach and awareness raising activities, such as the **BuloBus** initiative in Spain or **Webwise** in Ireland that has worked with older people and very young people to encourage safe internet use.

Feedback from the mapping and stakeholders did however highlight a need to reassert a focus on media literacy education and skills in public policy agendas, alongside regulatory measures, and associated actions (24 respondents reported that this issue was extremely important, and a further 26 very or moderately important). There was some evidence of media literacy education being embedded in **broader education and skills agendas**. However, in practice media literacy initiatives in education systems are generally most closely linked with digital skills agendas and frameworks, including digital safety, digital skills for employability, and digital education infrastructure agendas. For example, in Italy, media literacy actions are embedded in the **National Digital School Plan**, which addresses digital education more broadly in the school system, and which included the integration of media education into digital education skills development. Similarly in Romania measures in relation to digital education and digitalization of follow European digital competencies frameworks and agendas and have included elements relevant to media literacy.

There was less evidence of media literacy education initiatives that made a more substantive connection between media literacy and the broader set of competencies and values required for active citizenship. There are examples of media literacy components being included as part of long-standing citizenship education agendas, such as in France, Germany and the UK, and more recently in Ireland. These include media literacy components as part of general citizenship curricula, as well as in targeted education schemes to address political extremism and polarisation. Further examination would be needed to assess the scope and focus of media literacy curricula within these programmes and activities. For example, in 2017 **Eurydice** analysis highlighted that in the context of a broad and multifaceted landscape for citizenship education, dimensions focused on critical media literacy were generally afforded less priority in curricula and competencies. Questions include the balance between the current policy focus on digital safety and disinformation, technical skills and competencies for accessing and using different types of media, or broader approaches to media literacy that support the development of broader civic and democratic competencies and values.

Furthermore, the extent to which media literacy learning objectives were embedded or implemented through education programmes in practice was less clear. The survey of practitioners and stakeholders highlighted the issue of integrating media literacy into educational curricula as an ongoing challenge. By way of illustration, in Poland media literacy is one of the core competencies of compulsory education but the extent to which it was embedded in national curricula was not evident. Many of the media literacy education initiatives highlighted across the case studies were delivered as extra-curricular elements, with limited ongoing support for educators and schools or integration into curricula. Furthermore, there was limited evidence of media literacy frameworks being integrated into lifelong learning agendas. There was limited evidence of media literacy actions targeted at specific professional groups, including teachers and educators. There was also limited evidence of a broader range of measures that target other relevant professional groups including journalists, either in initial qualification or professional development.

There was also concern that the current media literacy agenda is not fully addressing the needs of vulnerable or seldom heard groups. This review did not conduct a systematic or representative mapping of all media literacy activities so cannot draw firm conclusions. Nevertheless, whilst the bulk of actions reviewed through the study were primarily focused on educational resources for school age children and young people there was little evidence of systematic approaches, including research, to ensure strategies and activities effectively engaged with diverse media literacy needs across society. This includes variations in terms of geographic focus (such as in the case of France) or in relation to specific minorities or social groups. This was reinforced by stakeholders who highlighted challenges in relation to vulnerable and underserved groups. These included a lack of reliable data to understand needs, a lack of perceived demand or need for media literacy amongst target groups or professionals working with groups. Other dimensions included a lack of prioritisation in policy making and resources to meet specific needs, such in different languages.

3.2 Key issues moving forward

This review has highlighted the ongoing importance of the media literacy agenda to current European and national policy and policy priorities. At the same time the review has also highlighted the need to reinforce elements of the media literacy agenda is in the context of focus on media regulation measures and the digital skills and online safety education and training agendas. Any response to current and emerging policy agendas, including complex and evolving challenges such mis and disinformation and the emerging challenges of generative AI, will require clear action and tools to ensure access to accurate information and transparent media. Ultimately however the long-term solution to these complex challenges will be founded on the media literacy and empowerment of European citizens to leverage the value of media in democratic, inclusive, and open societies. In this context and based on the feedback from the country case studies there are several key themes that can be observed in relation to realising media literacy aims and objectives in Europe.

Developing citizen centred media literacy strategies

The ability to access and engage with and participate in media is fundamental to the continued health of open and democratic societies. The evolving challenge in relation to generative AI technologies, their impact on mis- and disinformation trends, present notable challenges that further highlights the importance of developing broad based approaches to media literacy. Within the current landscape there is a clear and important emphasis on media regulation and associated measures that ensure enable users and citizens can access credible, verifiable, and trustworthy information sources and media. Many of the measures that are emerging from the introduction of the **DSA** and associated actions such as the 2022 **Code of Practice on Disinformation** are essential components for any efforts to improve the quality of information online. This includes moderation and flagging of illegal or harmful or misleading content, and associated verification and community tools for users.

At the same time there is an ongoing need to consider how this current policy focus can be leveraged to support citizens to critically engage with the evolving media landscape. It will be essential to augment narrow approaches focused on information literacy and awareness by equipping citizens with the skills that they need to engage to actively engage with media as part of their participation in democratic societies. Reactive or targeted approaches to media literacy that are solely focused on regulating or targeting mis and disinformation issues, whilst important, are unlikely to be effective as standalone actions over the longer-term. In this context it is not yet clear how measures focused on mis and disinformation translate into coherent policy frameworks that not only aim to address proliferation, but also the effectiveness and impact of polarising and misleading content. This issue is exacerbated by deep seated concerns about the extent to which media and technology firms are committed to transparency of their ecosystems and taking meaningful steps in relation to the design of their platforms that may affect user engagement, intellectual property, or competitive advantage.

A key challenge therefore will be the integration and prioritisation of a wider set of media literacy aims and competencies into this evolving policy landscape. This will require approaches to media literacy that build on regulatory measures and tools for identifying accurate and trustworthy information, but which enable users to make informed choices based on how media and associated technologies operate. This includes critically appraising the ways in which information and perspectives are presented or amplified or mediated, either through traditional media sources organisation or by social media platforms. As part of this there also needs to be continued work to establish and develop shared values in relation to the use and sharing of information and interactions through social media. Whilst these efforts must necessarily build on basic requirements in relation to terms and conditions of use and community standards, media literacy efforts across these dimensions also need to engage with fundamental questions about the role of social media in open and democratic societies.

In this the broader aims of media literacy will be a crucial to the success of the current policy and regulatory focus on mis and disinformation. Developing broader media literacy-based approaches to these challenges should aim to ensure that citizens are equipped and can have confidence to engage with and shape the media environment as part of their engagement in open and democratic societies and discourse. This includes ensuring basic standards for media and social media. appropriate supporting tools and resources for users to appraise information. At the same time sustainable media literacy strategies will also need to equip citizens, including both in our role as consumers but also as creators on social media, to understand our roles and relationships with media platforms. Priorities will include developing media literacy education actions and interventions that directly engage with the role of media in open and democratic societies including:

› Enabling users to appraise and interrogate the transparency and openness of media sources, platforms and companies, and their commitment and contribution to democratic, inclusive, and open societies.

› Supporting educational measures that equip citizens with competencies, knowledge skills that enable them to engage and participate in a diverse and evolving media landscape.

› Considering a broader range of target groups or perspectives, including young people but also evolving roles as consumers and content creators, and professional groups.

› Developing multi-stakeholder partnerships to embed media literacy in education curricula whilst leveraging the capacities of public authorities, education institutions, media companies and civil society.

Mainstreaming media literacy education

As part of the development of broader based media literacy strategies and associated measures it will be necessary to deepen the integration of media literacy into formal education, including schools and lifelong learning. The review did identify a wide range of media literacy initiatives that were targeted at school age children and young people. This included a range of initiatives offering teaching resources for teachers and parents through to initiatives that directly supported teaching and learning activities in both formal and informal education settings.

In some cases, these initiatives were being supported at a national level, including with the input of relevant ministries as well as media regulators. Many of these initiatives were developed and delivered by third party NGOs, including with the support of public funding. However, as highlighted by the survey (Figure 2), media literacy is generally a low priority in education curricula and assessment frameworks, which was further compounded by the limited availability of high quality, age and linguistically appropriate resources.

Moving forward the digital and citizenship education policy agendas at the European and national levels presents a potential avenue for further creating complementary synergies with media literacy education objectives. At the same time there is a risk that media literacy in the context of these frameworks is overly focused either on technical digital skills or as a minor adjunct to national citizenship curricula. Currently there is little evidence that broad citizen centred media literacy objectives are being systematically embedded or mainstreamed in educational curricula and schools, or through lifelong learning policies and associated measures. In this context practical challenges that will need to be addressed as part of any meaningful actions on media literacy going forward will include:

› Providing support for teachers, including teacher training and associated competencies to deliver media literacy education and curricula.

› Supporting approaches for mainstreaming media literacy into curricula and topics beyond of targeted media literacy interventions.

› Enabling sustainable collaborations between schools and external media literacy education partners.

› Enhancing consistency of practices across the diverse media literacy sector that can help to guide educational activities.

› Supporting good quality teaching and educational resources and materials.

'It takes much more effort and time to work with schools than anticipated. Something often comes up that endangers continuity'.

Media Literacy NGO Netherlands

In this context an important step will be the development of a European media literacy competency framework. Currently media literacy is noted as a component part of part of the digital and citizenship competencies of the European key competences for lifelong learning[394] whilst relevant dimensions are also included in the associated **DigiComp** competency framework (see box below).[395] Digital skills are also a key element of the broader European digital transition agenda[396] and media literacy is noted as part of the diverse landscape of national citizenship education curricula.[397] However, there is currently no corresponding competency framework for media literacy that can help to guide approaches within these agendas. A clearer understanding of the competencies associated with media literacy is needed to enable educators and policy makers navigate the relationship between media literacy and other associated education agendas. This includes establishing appropriate links between digital and skills and broader critical and citizenship dimensions of media literacy agendas that can support broad media literacy strategies and objectives.

The development of a media literacy competency framework would require extensive engagement and dialogue between media literacy practitioners, educators, as well as with policy makers to ensure that it is relevant inclusive and meaningful. A key challenge would be to ensure that it offers a complementary tool that can guide media literacy practice across a range of contexts whilst reinforcing the specific dimensions of media literacy aims and objectives in the context of associated education and policy agendas. At the same time, it should not be intended or used as a proscriptive or homogenising check list. A competency can provide the scaffolding that can help support the design of interventions, curricula, as well as assessment and evaluation in the context of diverse and evolving media literacy landscape. With this in mind the development of a competency framework would need to:

› Articulate a broad set of critical media literacy competencies that enable users to understand how media operates alongside technical skills and awareness of sources.

› Equip people to critically interrogate the transparency and openness of media sources, platforms and companies and their commitment and contribution to democratic, inclusive, and open societies.

› Provide a practical framework for equipping people with competencies and values to participate and engage with different kinds of media as part of open and democratic societies and discourse.

› Support the development of appropriate connections with national citizenship education curricula and European digital competencies frameworks.

› Develop a shared reference point for stakeholders and practitioners operating across a diverse media literacy landscape and education contexts to guide activities.

› Support the design of clear media literacy curricula and learning objectives, development of learning resources, and assessment of outcomes.

› Ensure sufficient flexibility to enable practitioners and policy makers to leverage and adapt the framework as a guide for developing interventions across a range of settings and curricula or interventions.

› Engage a range of practitioners, stakeholders and experts from across the media literacy community and beyond through its development.

› Ensure that any competency framework remains a living document that underpins dialogue on media literacy policy and practice in the context of a diverse and evolving media literacy landscape.

Supporting sustainable multi stakeholder partnerships

The review has further highlighted the importance of multi stakeholder partnerships. Partnerships underpin the development and delivery of broad-based media literacy strategies that can address rapidly evolving and complex media literacy challenges. Across all the examples reviewed there was a wide range of public, private and NGO organisations involved the implementation of the diversity of media literacy actions these included:

› Public authorities including ministries responsible for media and culture as well as education ministries, and associated media regulators and agencies at the national and regional levels.

- Private media firms including large scale platforms, media organisations and publishers as well as media agencies.

- Education and research organisations, including education authorities, schools, further education, and higher education institutions.

- NGOs including organisations that support media literacy education activities, engage, and mobilise professional groups, and support a range of observatory and fact-checking activities.

- Grass roots civil society and voluntary organisations, including for example community, youth or sports groups, that support informal education and community engagement activities.

The value of partnerships can be seen in relation to the development of effective media literacy interventions including for example:

- Developing education interventions through collaboration between education authorities, education institutions, and educators alongside organisations that can provide expertise on media literacy curricula, materials and methods and issues, including the input of different professional groups such as journalists and librarians.

- Identifying and communicating media literacy trends, including emerging risks and dynamics in relation to mis- and disinformation, expertise to process and identify common trends and issues, the capacity to develop fact-checking products and offers, the ability to disseminate fact-checking or other outputs through trusted channels.

- Community engagement, including opportunities to embed media literacy as part of broader community engagement and cohesion activities, informal education opportunities, expertise and pathways to access specific communities, and empowerment of groups and communities through social capital and participation.

'The reach and impact of this project relies heavily on cross-sector collaboration. Working with trusted, third-party intermediaries is critical in terms of delivering learning at a grass-roots level.'

Media literacy stakeholder Ireland

Based on feedback to this study key issues for developing and maintaining multi stakeholder partnerships include:

- Funding, including the limited duration of funding that limits the stability and sustainability of partnerships, as well as challenges meeting funding or administrative requirements or alignment of criteria with organisational needs and values.

- Trust and transparency within partnerships including establishing shared or common principles that guide collaboration and openness and transparency of activities, including by media companies, and their contribution and alignment to media literacy objectives.

AI and new technologies

Across all the countries reviewed and direct feedback from stakeholders the ongoing impact of social media and the impact of new technologies were persistent areas of focus. In several countries, there were measures being developed to address emergent challenges in relation to AI, including research institutions in the case of France and new laws in the case of Romania. In most cases, it was viewed as essential that these issues were proactively integrated into strategic and practical media literacy responses and activities including:

- Addressing AI and new technologies through media literacy curricula and resources and education activities, including broad based media literacy competencies.

- Developing the capacity of key professional groups, including educators and journalists, as well as NGOs and civil society organisations.

- Ensuring that there are appropriate moderation and information tools that enable users to identify AI generated content.

- Establishing community and social norms and practices in relation to the use and dissemination of AI generated materials.

- Identifying new trends and innovations, including impacts on mis- and disinformation on both social media and traditional or conventional medias.

- Identifying opportunities for employing new technologies in fact-checking and identifying and challenging mis- and disinformation campaigns.

Evaluation and monitoring

There was a general absence of consistent approaches to evaluating the effectiveness of media literacy activities, including the impact of interventions. Effective evaluation is essential to support prioritisation of actions, guide investment, and improve general confidence in activities. Further support is needed at all levels to develop meaningful evaluation of media literacy interventions, including transparency of relevant data on the impacts of interventions. Evaluation will benefit from the development of common frameworks for media literacy activities, including competency frameworks in the case of education interventions, programme evaluation frameworks and criteria in for media literacy strategies, and investment in evaluation methods, tools, and expertise.

3.3 Conclusions and recommendations

The media literacy landscape is diverse and is characterised by action that is being implemented through media regulation agendas alongside broader education and skills agendas. Key challenges include:

› The need to prioritise and support broad based media literacy at the European and national level by the range of public authorities and stakeholders.

› The ongoing need to implement impactful measures to improve access to quality and trustworthy information and media, including by social media and search platforms.

› Enhancing the quality, reach and impact of media literacy education interventions, including the extent to which these have been embedded in national curricula.

› Supporting sustainable partnerships that underpin broad based media literacy actions, including the capacity of professional groups and NGOs and civil society organisations.

› The need to review approaches to media literacy and associated regulatory measures to monitor and adapt to the emerging impacts of new technologies.

Based on these themes some high-level recommendations for action by media literacy policy makers and stakeholders across Europe include:

1. Develop broad-based media literacy strategies

European and other public authorities, media companies, including social media and search platforms, alongside researchers and media literacy practitioners, should work together to develop broad based media literacy strategies. This includes actions to develop broader approaches that create synergies between media regulation measures to equip and empower users and society to critically appraise and utilise the value of transparent and free media in democratic, inclusive and open societies. Key actions include:

› Review media literacy strategies to incorporate measures that enhance the contribution of a free and transparent media to the democratic empowerment of citizens.

› Develop and invest in media literacy measures and associated actions that equip users to critically appraise media and their contribution and commitment to democratic, inclusive and open societies.

› Continue to strengthen effective measures that support access to reliable and accurate information, including tools that can enable users to appraise sources and information.

› Develop the capacity of key partners and stakeholders including fact-checking organisations, observatories, and education systems, to support a range of media literacy actions and activities.

› Review media literacy approaches in relation to different groups and perspectives, including general populations, young people, professional groups, and evolving creator and publisher roles on social media.

› Establish monitoring initiatives, including access to relevant data from media platforms, to identify trends and risks in relation to media, emerging technologies, and measures, to inform media literacy activities.

› Ensure that media literacy strategies and actions effectively engage vulnerable and underserved groups, including research into different media literacy needs, and proactive stakeholder consultation.

› Review funding programmes to ensure that they foster continued evolution and longer-term implementation that supports broader media literacy objectives and strategies.

2. Mainstream media literacy into education curricula

Policy makers and media literacy stakeholders and practitioners should review opportunities to further embed media literacy into education and lifelong learning agendas and policy frameworks, including digital education and digital transition agendas, and citizenship education programmes. This includes:

› Develop a European media literacy competency framework to guide the development and implementation of education initiatives and programmes.

› Reinforce approaches to critical media literacy education, moving beyond technical digital skills and awareness, toward broader understanding of media and the empowerment of users and citizens.

› Develop approaches for embedding media literacy competencies into the design and assessment of media literacy learning outcomes.

› Support teacher training and development opportunities including methods for integrating media literacy topics and competencies into different subjects and curricula.

› Support the development of good quality media literacy resources in local languages that can support the work of educators.

› Ensure that the range of tools, resources and methods for verifying and appraising information online are properly integrated into the digital education curricula.

› Ensure that issues of online citizenship and media literacy norms and behaviours are incorporated into active citizenship education curricula.

› Continue to support a diverse range of targeted educational interventions that can be delivered in formal and informal school and lifelong learning settings including educational interventions that work with different professional groups and different educational methodologies.

3. Multi stakeholder partnerships

Policy makers, media companies, including social media and search platforms, and media literacy stakeholders and practitioners should invest in partnerships to support broad based media literacy strategies that can respond to evolving media literacy challenges and needs. This includes:

› Work with a range of partners and stakeholders, including NGOs, civil society organisations, and other types of partners, to develop and implement media literacy measures.

› Support training and capacity development for relevant professions, including fact-checking competencies and capacities for journalist and media organisations.

› Develop transparent partnership principles founded on a commitment to open societies and the implementation of effective media literacy actions.

› Review funding arrangements to provide opportunities for long term sustainable partnerships whilst also creating space for innovation of approaches.

› Work with a diversity of organisations including civil society organisations that represent or engage with underserved or vulnerable communities.

4. Invest in transparency and evaluation

Policy makers, funders, media companies, including social media and search platforms, and practitioners should invest in transparent monitoring and evaluation of the impacts of media literacy measures to guide effective action and build confidence in media literacy measures. This includes:

› Invest in evaluation of media literacy activities, including as a component of funding initiatives and schemes where relevant.

› Develop evaluation methods that assess the impact of a media literacy intervention, including impacts on real world behaviours of users and society, including access to data.

› Incorporate shared media literacy competency frameworks into assessment of learning outcomes to improve consistency and comparability of approaches.

› Undertake programme evaluation to assess the relevance and coherence of interventions as part of broad-based media literacy strategies.

› Commit to transparent publication of evaluation and monitoring results.

Annex One: Country selection

The case study research aimed to provide deep dives into media literacy policy and practice in a cross-section of European countries. This aspect of the study was designed to situate Google's work in context and explore how media literacy initiatives have evolved in contrasting settings, identifying which challenges and opportunities are common to Member States and which have a more specific dimension according to factors such as the policy and regulatory regime or population-level differences in levels of media literacy and engagement in democratic life. They looked beyond Google's programmes alone, to understand what other actions are being taken by actors at a country level. The criteria for selection attended to the following:

d. Different policy and regulatory contexts, including differences in media and press freedoms, approaches towards citizenship education, and country level laws and policies concerning the regulation of misinformation/disinformation, online harms and technology policy as this intersects with media literacy.

e. Varying levels of media literacy and media engagement in the general population.

f. Geographical mix (Western, Southern, Northern and Eastern Europe).

g. Focussing data collection where Google's partnerships and support projects are located.

Shortlisted countries

The countries selected for the case study research include the following:

1. **France**
2. **Germany**
3. **Ireland**
4. **Italy**
5. **Poland**
6. **Romania**
7. **Spain**
8. **UK**

Table A1 overleaf shows how the criteria apply to the chosen countries, and the data sources that informed this choice. The final selection achieves a mix of media literacy and disinformation policy and regulatory approaches. This includes countries with well-established or increasingly strong frameworks (e.g. France, Germany, Ireland, and more recently Spain) and contexts where national policy frameworks are at an earlier stage of development (e.g. Poland, Italy, Romania). The country selection facilitates a comparison of the relative balance struck at a country level between media literacy, disinformation policy and implementation frameworks as well as the interaction with associated policy strands, including online safety and counter extremism (e.g. the UK), and digital skills frameworks (e.g. Poland and Spain). Finally, the selection allows for a consideration of the significance of community and population risks in relation to media literacy and disinformation, including indicators in relation to digital skills, media literacy practices and awareness of disinformation.

Table A1. Selection of countries for deep dive case studies

Country	Regulatory and policy context[398]		Population trends			Region
	Media literacy policy	Protections against disinformation	Population with above basic digital skills[399] EU average 26.46%	Population that verifies information online news sites[400] EU average 23%	Population reporting exposure to dis-information[401] EU average 28%	
1. France	Lower risk	Medium risk	31.25%	23%	24%	West
2. Germany	Lower risk	Lower risk	18.84%	19%	16%	Central
3. Ireland	Lower risk	Medium risk	48.13%	34%	18%	Nordic
4. Italy	Medium risk	Medium risk	22.52%	N/A	29%	South
5. Poland	Higher risk	Medium risk	20.65%	16%	33%	East
6. Romania	Medium risk	Higher risk	20.83%	29%	36%	East
7. Spain	Medium risk	High risk	38.06%	28%	40%	South
8. UK	Lower risk (Ecorys assessment)	Lower risk (Ecorys assessment)	N/A	N/A	N/A	West

Annex Two: Stakeholder engagement and data collection overview

The table below presents a summary of the main data collection tasks, and types of stakeholder consultations, that informed this report.

Strand/activity	Aims	Countries and initiatives in focus	Rationale for selection	Methods & key stakeholders to be consulted
Country deep dive case studies	› Exploring how MLIs have evolved in different country contexts across Europe. › Comparing and contrasting Google's MLIs with homegrown (non-Google affiliated) examples. › Generating country-specific findings and insights from diverse target groups.	› UK › France › Germany › Spain › Poland › Italy › Romania › Ireland	8 x countries in Europe, reflecting a mix of different policy and regulatory frameworks, media literacy challenges, and a mix of different country-level interventions.	Mixed methods: › Desk research and analysis of key policy, legal and programmatic documentation at a country level. › A series of interviews with policy, industry & media representatives as well as MLI project coordinators (approx.7-15 per country). › 3 x embedded mini-examples of MLIs per country including both Google examples and others. › Completed case study template for the compendium.
Survey research	› Testing the key research questions and topics at scale (e.g. key ML challenges/ opportunities in the European context, impact of Gen AI on critical thinking skills & mis- and disinformation, challenges and solutions). › Gathering feedback on the effectiveness of Google's MLIs and partnerships in Europe. › Understanding participant experiences & outcomes.	› Europe	Administered with media literacy practitioners (at EU and country levels). 58 stakeholders consulted in total.	› Web survey, administered online using EU Survey Tool
Key stakeholder consultations, EU-level	› Providing high-level expert insights on the study's key topics (with a focus on AI and emerging technologies) › Providing a sounding board to test emerging findings and identify recommendations.	› Various – focus on Europe & selected international experts	Engagement with key EU-level policy stakeholders and subject experts, representatives from civil society, consumers and media associations.	› 20 x semi-structured high-level key stakeholder interviews › 1 in-person pre-launch workshop with representation from all key stakeholder groups.

Annex Three: Consultation topic guides

This Annex presents the topic guides used for i. country-level stakeholder interviews and ii. EU-level interviews in turn.

i. Topic guide for interviews with country representatives			
Respondent name:		Organisation:	
Interviewer:		Date of interview:	

Interviewer instructions

This topic guide is designed for use with key stakeholders at country-level as part of the case study research of the **Google Media Literacy Policy Study** across four main stakeholder groups: i) country-level policymakers, ii) media literacy initiative (MLI) stakeholders, iii) CSOs/media representatives and iv) tech industry representatives.

The function of these stakeholder interviews is to collect further evidence to answer the research questions in the case study template, complimenting your desk research. Given the diversity of the stakeholders targeted for these interviews, this topic guide should be used as 'source catalogue' for relevant questions and tailored according to the roles and responsibilities of individual respondents. While some indications have been added in yellow highlight throughout the topic guide regarding which stakeholder groups to consult for specific sections, **it is the responsibility of country experts to undertake further tailoring to the guide** where appropriate, in liaison with the core study team if needed. We also strongly encourage you to leverage the interviews to fill specific gaps in the desk research.

As some of the questions may require interviewees to prepare in advance (i.e. to consult colleagues or country-level data/indicators), **please make sure to share a high-level list of key topics with interviewees in good time ahead of the scheduled consultation** (ideally a week before).

Introduction

Thank you for speaking with me today. As you are aware, Ecorys is conducting a **Media Literacy Policy Study for Google**. The study aims to provide information that can support the optimisation of Google's policy and programmes in the media literacy space in Europe.

More specifically, running between August 2023- July 2024, the study aims to:

› Appraise the role of media and information literacy in the digital age;
› Evaluate the effectiveness and effectiveness frameworks of Google, YouTube, and other media literacy programmes/initiatives with a special focus on the vulnerable and their support networks;
› Outline the challenges and opportunities around advanced tech and AI in improving media literacy and online safety in Europe, including for vulnerable communities;
› Develop specific recommendations e.g. for tech companies, education institutions, civil society and policymakers to support media literacy, and;
› Share best practice and signpost to methodologies/results that others can use.

In meeting these aims, we're thus conducting a comprehensive series of cross-sectoral stakeholder consultations with the public-, tech industry- and civil society sectors across Europe.

Interview format and topics

Our discussion today will last about **45 minutes to an hour.**

Specifically, we will touch on the following central themes [note: tailor as relevant]:

c. The national policy and regulatory framework for ML;
d. Understanding country-level ML risks and harms;
e. The landscape of ML initiatives in your country, and;
f. Future-proofing and key recommendations.

As media literacy is a broad topic, it will be fine if we need to cover some points by email afterwards.

Informed consent and confidentiality

Our conversation today is confidential. I would like to record our conversation, to capture our discussion in full, but this will only be used to assist with writing-up the interview and will deleted afterwards. We will not identify or attribute views to individual respondents in the study reports. You can tell me at any stage if you wish to speak off the record, and I will respect this request.

> Do you have any questions before we start?   Y   N
> Do I have your permission to begin recording?   Y   N

Introduction and definitions (all)

To start, could you please briefly outline your:

> Position (role/title within your organisation)
> Expertise in the area of media literacy (i.e. thematic focus area(s)/number of years in the field)

How would you define the term ''media literacy''?

> Do you have a working definition of 'media literacy' within your organisation?
> (Introduce our working definition[402]) To what extent do you agree with this working definition?

A. National policy and regulatory framework

A1. National policy and legislative objectives for ML (Policymakers/civil society/Tech)

4. To your knowledge, what are the key pieces of legislation in place regulating media literacy in your country?

Please consider all national legislation of relevance to media literacy, including:

> Online harms and internet safety;
> Privacy and information rights;
> Tackling misinformation and disinformation;
> Press and media freedoms, and;
> Citizenship and education.

5. What are the current **policy priorities** for media literacy in your country? How are these reflected in country-level policy strategies and commitments?

Prompt: How does media literacy feature within:

› Democratic resilience and the fight against mis/disinformation;
› National educational plans and strategies (e.g. re citizenship education, digital literacy);
› Digital transformation policies (e.g. re online harms/internet safety, privacy/information rights);
› Media and culture policies (e.g. concerning press and media freedoms).

(NOTE: please log the specific strategies or plans identified, to harvest afterwards)

6. **For policymakers only:** How are **responsibilities for media literacy** (and associated services) currently organised at a national level across public authorities (and representative bodies)?

› Where do responsibilities sit across ministries?
› What do the different ministerial briefs cover?
› How are these coordinated (what are the governance arrangements)?

What other public agencies are involved and how does their remit cover media literacy (and associated services)?

› Education agencies
› Digital agencies
› Broadcasters/Public Service Media
› Cultural institutions
› Other

7. **For policymakers only:** How is the **EU regulatory landscape** shaping media literacy policies and practices in your country?

› To your knowledge, how are the DSA, AI Code of Practice, Code of Practice on Disinformation and other key EU-level initiatives landing?
› What are the challenges to transposition/implementation and how are they being addressed?

8. In promoting media literacy objectives in your country, what is the role played by:

› **Civil society** (e.g. NGOs and educational charities), and by teacher, learner and parental associations and networks?
› The **tech industry,** including Big Tech?

9. In your expert view, what are the **strengths of the overall national ML framework** in your country and the **relative balance between key strands** (e.g. in education policy; digital skills vs critical thinking and digital citizenship focus)

10. As you see it, are there **gaps, barriers or inhibiting factors** within your country's ML framework? If so, how are/could these be addressed?

A2. The current state of media literacy

1. In your view, what are the current **community and population enablers/risks** when it comes to media literacy and disinformation in **your country** (please cite key indicators to the extent possible).

    › Prompt: Please consider the following:
        › current media literacy levels;
        › media consumption practices;
        › digital skills;
        › democratic (dis/)engagement and trust;
        › awareness of mis/disinformation;
        › other relevant indicators.

2. What population groups in your country appear to be **most at risk/vulnerable** when it comes to media literacy and heightened susceptibility to mis/disinformation (e.g. older citizens, citizens from migrant/ rural/low-SES backgrounds, children and young people)? What evidence are you aware of that supports this?

3. **Are there any particular societal challenges/risks that stand out in your country's context,** (e.g. in the context of disinformation, domestic challenges associated with extremism and/or populist/far-right political dynamics)? Please point us to sources for further reading on these issues, if possible.

    Prompts:

    › What kinds of manipulation techniques are routinely encountered by citizens in your country and how do these differ between contexts and target groups?
    › What specific challenges are presented by misinformation or disinformation surrounding events (e.g. elections, humanitarian crisis)?
    › What challenges are posed by specific forms of malign content, e.g., misogyny, hate speech, state-sponsored mis- or disinformation campaigns?
    › In your expert view, what are the implications of the legality of harmful content in your country, and to what extent does this differ between target groups and settings?
    › What existing media literacy initiatives are you aware of at national/regional/local levels in your country, if any? Please cite their name, focus and coordinating organisation(s) and point us to sources for further reading on these issues, if possible.
    › Is the media literacy initiative landscape a varied landscape, or are there a few dominant actors (e.g. Ministries, school-level stakeholders, civil society, big tech, edtech)?

4. Considering your country's specific context, how could forthcoming media literacy initiatives best respond to local needs? What, if anything, should actors launching them be mindful of?

    › Where would the initiatives be best targeted (e.g. key issues/target groups/approaches)?

B. Key media literacy initiatives (MLI stakeholders only)

[Note: as the initiatives are vastly different in nature, the below questions are semi-structured and include a range of possible prompts. It is up to the country researchers to tailor the guide as needed ahead of each interview with MLI stakeholders in line with the nature of the initiative].

B1. Initiative overview

1. Could you please provide us with a brief overview of this initiative including **(note: use the prompts below to compliment/verify the information you already have via initiative website/key documents):**

   › The intervention type (e.g Education/curriculum-focussed programmes, ii) Community programme, iii) campaigns and behavioural interventions, iv) Product tool/feature or v) other)

   › Where the practice is implemented (e.g. national level/regional level/school-level practice). If the practice is implemented in multiple countries, please also list these (e.g. UK, Spain, FR)

   › Period of implementation (start and end dates)

   › The main stakeholders/organisations involved

   › Target group(s), e.g. general population, school children aged 7-12, senior citizens

   › Why was it implemented (What problems/issues it is addressing?)

   › Key aims of the initiative

B2. Design and implementation

B2.1 Design

1. How were the issues to be addressed identified? Are they context/country-specific?

2. How were the partnerships between key actors established and roles and responsibilities defined?

3. How were the project's media literacy aims and outcomes articulated and operationalised (were end users involved in the design)?

4. Were there any specific lessons learned from designing and setting up the initiative (e.g. scaling the initiative/supporting its role out)?

B2.2 Implementation

5. What were the key actions carried out across the implementation cycle?

6. How has [insert grant organisation here, e.g. Google] funding been operationalised?

7. How has the partnership between key actors been carried out in practice (approach to cooperation, incl. communication)?

8. Please mention any factors that helped or hindered reach and uptake along the way and how this was tackled.

B3. Initiative assessment

1. What evidence of effectiveness currently exists for the initiative (evaluation and/or assessment, surveys/feedback from participants)?

2. In your view, what are the main factors that facilitated (success factors) and/or hindered (challenges) the effectiveness of the initiative (e.g. when it comes to reaching target groups)? To what extent are these factors country/context-specific?

3. In your view, to what extent was the initiative cost-effective/efficient?

4. In your expert view, to what extent has the focus of the initiative been relevant in addressing
   › the most pressing ML needs in the country (and for the target groups in question)?
   › As you see it, are there any future trends that may affect the relevance of the initiative in the future (if initiative is ongoing)?

5. To what extent do you think the initiative is coherent/aligned with other ML activities in the country/Europe. How could synergies be improved?

B4. Monitoring and evaluation practices

1. What use has Google and its partners made of monitoring and evaluation in the context of this initiative?

2. How were media literacy outcomes defined (for the purpose of measurement)?

3. What kinds of metrics and KPIs were used?
   › In your view, what were their strengths and drawbacks?

4. How have these indicators been measured and by whom?
   › In your opinion how successful have these measurement practices been?

5. What were the main (e.g. skills/resource/practical) challenges you have encountered in undertaking monitoring and evaluation in the context of the initiative (and country context)?
   › How are/could these be addressed?

6. What further actions (e.g. research, monitoring or tracking) might be undertaken to better measure ML outcomes in the future?

B.5 Recommendations

1. Based on your experience implementing this initiative, please share any general/country-specific recommendations you may have regarding:

   › Google's funding practices;
   › Capacity building for civil society organisations;
   › Working with intermediaries to reach 'seldom heard' groups;
   › Adapting MLIs to specific needs or vulnerabilities (e.g. SEND, trauma);
   › Building resilience to manipulation for different audiences (older, younger, political orientation, etc);
   › Reaching and engaging citizens who don't trust institutions (e.g. influencers, crowdsourcing or peer-to-peer);
   › Other?

C. Looking ahead (all)

C1. Future-proofing

1. How do you see the media literacy landscape **evolving** in the years ahead?
   › What consultation, research or data analysis is being undertaken to forecast?
   › What do you see as being the main challenges and opportunities?
   › How can key actors respond?

2. What evidence do you already see of the impact of **transformative technologies** such as generative AI on media literacy needs in your country?
   › How are manipulation techniques changing?
   › What is the impact of emerging technologies on credibility cues (e.g. deepfakes, digital video, AI-generated or augmented content)?

3. To your knowledge, what are key stakeholders in the field doing to keep their media literacy initiatives (and related MEL practices) up to date (in view of the fast-evolving technology landscape)? How equipped are they to respond to these technological changes?

C2. Key recommendations

1. In your view, what would be the most appropriate and useful action(s) for Google and other tech actors within the EU in supporting the development of media literacy skills in your country?

   If nothing comes to mind, prompt with specific types of support/themes/target groups e.g.:

   › Funding/supporting education-focussed programmes;
   › Funding community-based programmes;
   › Capacity-building for civil society organisations;
   › Campaigns and behavioural interventions;
   › Product tools and features;
   › Other?

Interview closure

Thank you for speaking with me today.

I may be in contact in due course as discussed, with follow-up requests regarding some of the documents and data that you mentioned during our discussion.

In the meantime, don't hesitate to get in touch if you have any questions about the study.

Close interview

Interviewer note

This source topic guide is intended to form the basis of interviews with key stakeholders selected for their knowledge and expertise in media literacy at global and/or European levels, with a particular focus on the implications of AI and emerging technologies. The questions are mapped to the study framework from the inception report and are designed to allow a degree of generalisability and comparability between respondents. Separate topic guides are available for the case study research.

Prior to the interview, the interviewer should tailor the topic guide to reflect the specific expertise of the key stakeholder and the organisation they represent, e.g. by adding further prompts and adjusting the terminology. The interviews should last between 30 and 45 minutes, and recorded with respondents' permission, to complement written notes. Write-ups should be added to the analysis grid.

i. Topic guide for interviews with country representatives	
Respondent ID	
Respondent job title	
Organisation	
Date and time of interview	
Researcher	

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today. As outlined before the interview, Ecorys is carrying out a media literacy policy study on behalf of Google. The study aims to assess the current media literacy landscape in Europe, explore how this is changing, taking into account emerging technology such as generative AI, and to make policy and practice recommendations.

Our discussion today is one of a number of interviews with key stakeholders selected for their knowledge and expertise in media literacy and online safety, with a particular focus on the implications of AI and emerging technologies. The interview is confidential. We will be using the data to write a final report for publication, but we will not name or otherwise identify individuals who took part.

With your permission, I would like to record for my own notes only. Is that OK?

Do you have any questions before we start?

*** Begin recording ***

A. Professional and organisational background

› Could we start with a brief overview of your role and professional expertise?
› How does your work intersect with media literacy, online safety, and AI topics?

B. Responding to the changing media literacy landscape

- ❯ What developments have affected media information quality and integrity, during the time you have worked in this sector?Ask in general terms, then probe:
    - ❯ Technological
    - ❯ Market-related
    - ❯ Regulatory
    - ❯ Other factors (e.g. socio-cultural)
- ❯ How is the media literacy landscape changing, and what factors are involved?
    - ❯ At a global level
    - ❯ In Europe

C. The role and impacts of AI

- ❯ Specifically, how – and to what extent – is AI changing the media information ecosystem?
- ❯ How much change has already happened, and what future scenarios do you anticipate?
    - ❯ What data informs these scenarios?
    - ❯ How confident are you in them?
- ❯ To what extent to new developments in AI intersect with other forms of digitalisation (e.g. AR/VR and use of immersive environments)?
- ❯ What and to whom are the main risks presented in this current landscape? Ask in general, then probe:
    - ❯ News avoidance and mistrust in the media.
    - ❯ Malign influences such as extremism, hate speech or misogynistic content
    - ❯ Concerns about deep faked content to spread mis or disinformation
    - ❯ Concerns about the loss of critical thinking or research skills
- ❯ And what are the main opportunities?
- ❯ To what extent do these challenges and opportunities vary between media tools and platforms?
    - ❯ Are solutions platform-agnostic, or platform-dependent?
    - ❯ What factors help of hinder cross-platform standardisation?

AI for good

- ❯ What are the actual and potential roles of AI in counteracting misinformation and preserving media integrity?Ask in general terms, then probe responsible AI uses in relation to:
    - ❯ Media infrastructure
    - ❯ Media creation and content authorship
    - ❯ Media distribution and use
- ❯ What progress has been made in developing and training AI models to...?
    - ❯ Discern between trustworthy and untrustworthy news sources and narratives
    - ❯ Support fact checkers in their work
    - ❯ Alert consumers about source integrity
    - ❯ Mitigate against the spread of untrustworthy news sources and narratives

D. Identifying promising and/or effective practices

- ❯ Which (if any) media literacy policies or practices do would consider the most promising?
    - ❯ Why do you say this?
    - ❯ What is the supporting evidence?
- ❯ What types of monitoring and evaluation are undertaken in this field?
- ❯ What are the strengths and limitations of current efforts to capture and measure ML outcomes?

E. Skills, capacity building and sustainability

> What competences are needed for navigating AI-enriched media information environments?
> > For children
> > For adult citizens
> > For vulnerable or disadvantaged groups
> > For educators
> How and by whom are these competences best taught/acquired?
> What place is there for AI literacy within media literacy programmes and curricula?

Scalability

> In your experience, what challenges are encountered for developing and scaling media literacy initiatives? How are these best addressed?
> > Funding
> > Regulatory
> > Research

Governance

> What governance arrangements are needed to safeguard media integrity, and to ensure the scalability of effective media literacy policies and strategies?
> > Global
> > EU level
> > National and sub-national levels
> What more can be done to establish a collective 'whole ecosystem' approach?
> What would be your main message for Google, on what they can/should do?

F. Closure

> Was there anything else you wanted to discuss, that we haven't covered today?

Thank respondent and close the interview

Annex four: Country examples of Media Literacy Initiatives

🇫🇷 France

Overview of measure

The Anti-Disinformation Objective *(Objectif Désinfox)* was a large-scale anti-disinformation campaign led by news agency Agence France-Presse (AFP) during the 2022 French presidential and legislative elections. Arising from concerns about the risks posed by disinformation on democratic processes, the campaign was implemented between February and June 2022 and targeted the general population. A 'coalition' of 23 local and national media companies was established. Google supported the coalition by sharing its cutting-edge tools and expertise for news verification.

Implementation

During the project, the AFP and Google provided members of the coalition with fact-checking resources including training modules and a support platform animated by AFP experts. Digital tools used for fact-checking (e.g., Label Fact Check, Google Image Search, Trends, PinPoint, Invid-WeVerify, Politoscope, Visibrain) were made available. The project also aimed to give visibility to fact-checking processes carried out by the coalition via a dedicated webpage on the AFP's website. A series of YouTube videos was produced to raise awareness of different aspects of disinformation. The project also featured fact-checking videos debunking fake news or claims made by candidates.

Examples of YouTube videos featured in the Anti-Disinformation Objective project:
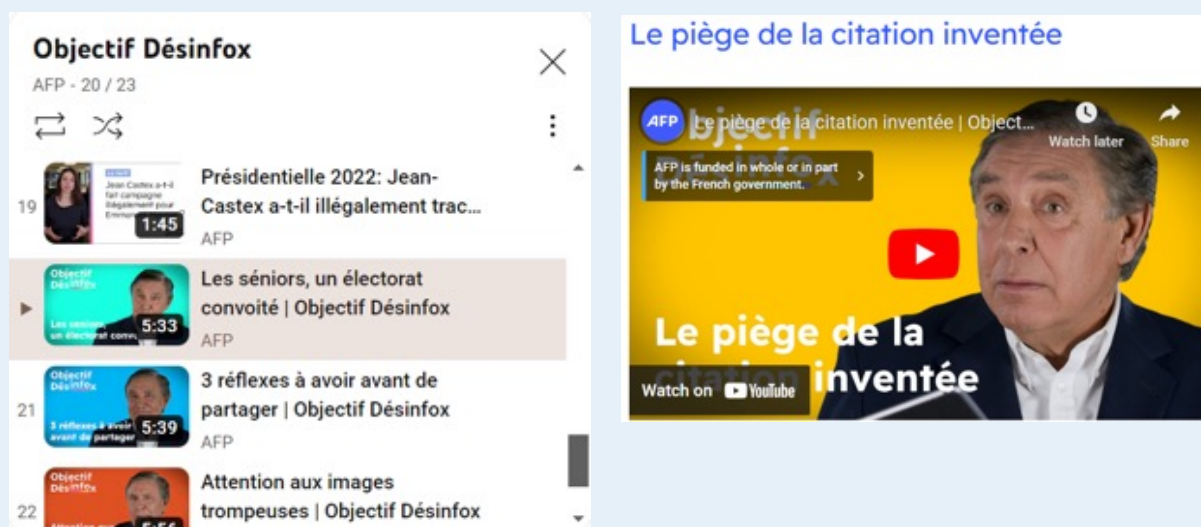
What works

The initiative had an interactive component through which users could report dubious news directly to the coalition for verification, which helped align the work of the coalition with users' needs. Moreover, the awareness-raising videos featured media personality Jean-Pierre Foucault (pictured above) and explicitly targeted seniors – an important objective as older citizens are often overlooked in national media literacy actions. Before the initiative, Google was already training journalists to use cutting-edge tools for news verification. Since the creation of its News Lab in 2015, 4200 journalists have been trained in France[403]. This partnership with AFP allowed a significant increase in the number of journalists upskilled.

Monitoring and evaluation practices

No information on monitoring and evaluation practices is available.

Website: https://factuel.afp.com/objectif-desinfox-2022

Initiative 2: Silly Conspiracies (Les Complots Rigolos)

Overview of measure

In 2018, non-profit organisation *Génération Numérique* launched their initiative, supported by Google, Silly Conspiracies (Les Complots Rigolos). The initiative consists of an eight-hour training module delivered across schools in France to pupils aged 15-18. The intervention aims at developing pupils' critical thinking skills to fight stereotypes and raise awareness of various manipulation techniques.

Implementation

The intervention is split across four days, with sessions lasting two hours each. The training content is structured around five 'key messages': 1) Draw attention to the mixture of fiction and reality genres and their effects; 2) Understand why we must distrust our own reasoning and sometimes think against ourselves; 3) Prevent the effects of deceptive and/or manipulative speech and avoid defending a cause poorly through fallacies; 4) The methodology of reasonable doubt: the scientific approach; 5) To believe is not to know; knowing is longer, more expensive and more difficult than believing.

To deliver this content, trainers rely on slides, videos, group games and tailored workshops. On the final day of the intervention, a practical exercise takes place whereby pupils analyse a specific conspiracy theory.

Beyond Google.org, *Génération Numérique* also received funding from the Interministerial Committee for the Prevention of Delinquency and Radicalisation (*Comité interministériel de prévention de la délinquance et de la radicalisation,* CIPDR), the Interministerial Delegation to Combat Racism, Anti-Semitism and Anti-LGBT Hate (*Délégation interministérielle à la lutte contre le racisme, l'antisémitisme et la haine anti-LGBT,* DILCRAH) and the Ministry of Culture.

Google.org support allowed the initiative to be upscaled by launching a 'train the trainer' component targeting adults who may benefit from Génération Numérique's expertise as part of their role (e.g., mediators, teachers, prevention officers, librarians). Google also helped Génération Numérique integrate artificial intelligence (AI) in their programme.

What works

A 2019 CIPDR evaluation of 'Les Complots Rigolos' confirmed the intervention's relevance[404]. Its interactive aspect (e.g., games, workshops) was found to be particularly effective in communicating key messages. The trainers' attitudes are also pivotal to the intervention's success, as those delivering the intervention are able to foster an open environment where pupils feel comfortable to contribute, value each participant's contributions, and ensure a fair distribution of speaking time among participants. Moreover, the intervention targets rural areas, which are underserved by existing MIL initiatives, and thus helps to fill a gap in the current MLI landscape in France.

Monitoring and evaluation practices

As mentioned above, an evaluation of the initiative was commissioned by CIPDR2g. This evaluation was carried out by MIL expert Séraphin Alava and provided recommendations to improve the initiative. Notably, it was suggested that pupils could be administered a survey before the training to gauge their trust in the media and belief in conspiracy theories. This would allow to better target the intervention to youth who are the most prone to social exclusion.

In terms of quantitative targets, the project aims to reach 15,000 pupils by the end of 2025. For the 'train the trainer' component, the target is 200 training days delivered to 2000-3000 trainers[405].

Contact

Website: https://asso-generationnumerique.fr/actions/action-demi-de-lutte-contre-les-theories-complotistes-pour-les-4e-et-plus/

Overview of measure

Lights on the News (Lumières sur l'Info) was founded in 2016 by journalists from prominent media outlets. The organisation delivers MIL workshops to young people aged 11-25 living in disadvantaged areas of the Ile-de-France region. Its creation was spurred by the 2015 Paris attacks, which increased disinformation and conspiracy theories, particularly in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Implementation

The organisation's journalists deliver MIL workshops both inside and outside the classroom to teach young people about the making of information. During the workshops, journalists ask young people to consult their phone and select a piece of content (e.g., post, picture, video) to be critically analysed.

Lights on the News also produces a YouTube series called 'TropMytho' featuring two young mascots, Scotty and Maïssa, who debunk fake news. The 65 videos released so far are disseminated on Instagram and TikTok and during in-person workshops. In February 2024, TropMytho hosted a webinar.

Examples of TropMytho videos:
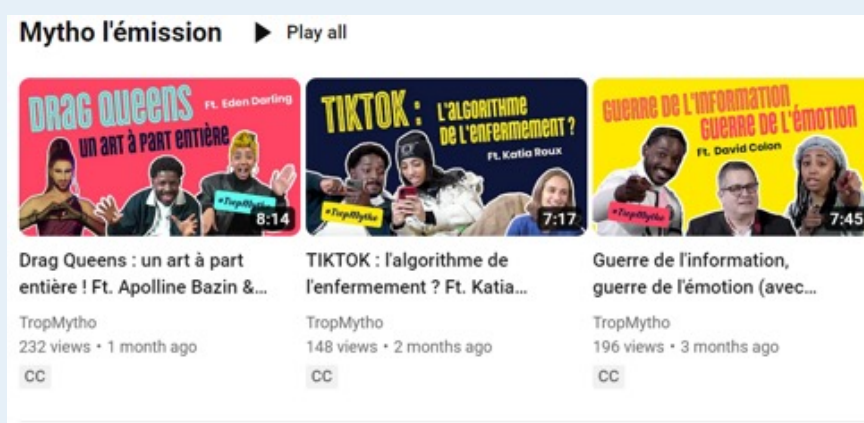
Young people aged 11-25 can also partake in a contest to create their own debunking video ('concours TropMytho').

Lights on the News receives funding from different actors including the Ministry of Culture, local authorities and foundations. The organisation is comprised of journalists and other professionals in the communications industry. These communication experts help produce the TropMytho videos. The team also includes an education expert, who advises on the organisation's pedagogical approach.

Initiative 3: Lights on the news (Lumières sur l'Info)[406]

What works

A key success factor of Lights on the News lies in actively reaching young people where they are: for example, one workshop was organised on a sports field. The bottom-up approach of the workshops has proved particularly effective, as journalists directly rely on young people's centres of interest. The intervention's interactive aspect, whereby young people are asked to select a piece of content, is pivotal to its success. Moreover, the fact that schools can use the 'Pass Culture' to pay Lights on the News' interventions has been a 'game changer' for the organisation as it has increased the demand for their intervention. The fact that schools have continued to invite the organisation from one year to the next also demonstrates the value of its work.

Monitoring and evaluation practices

The organisation tracks the number of pupils taking part in each workshop. In 2023, this was 2215. TropMytho's social accounts (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok) cumulate 5521 followers and videos have been seen 591907 times. However, it is difficult to assess the sustainability of the intervention without a test evaluating pupils' critical thinking skills. Currently, there is no structured way for the organisation to verify that each young person applies what they learned during the workshop after it has ended. However, as mentioned above, the fact that schools keep re-ordering the intervention demonstrates that they are satisfied with the intervention's outcomes.

Contact

Website: https://lumieres.info/

🇩🇪 Germany

Overview of measure

UseTheNews[407] is a media literacy initiative that was initiated in 2020 by the Deutsche Presse Agentur (DPA) and the Hamburg Ministry for Culture and Media. It operates across Germany to investigate news use and the competence of young people and develops information and education offers on this basis. It is a public/private partnership, with the aim of occupying the space between journalism, education policy and science. More specifically, this project aims to create practical knowledge in the area of media literacy for newsrooms and classrooms. The key target audiences are therefore journalists, teachers/classrooms, and young people themselves.

The driving force behind the initiative is summed up well by a quote from a 16-year-old girl relayed by an interviewee for this study: *"I have no clue how news is relevant for my daily life"*. The quote speaks to what an interviewee describes as " a growing disconnect between the news and the young audience of today". Substantiating this assertion, according to a Reuters report published in 2023[408], in Germany, trust in the news overall has fallen from 60% in 2015 to 43% in 2023.

Implementation

In the summer of 2022, *UseTheNews* was converted into a not-for-profit company, funded by more than 30 partners across the public and private sector, with an advisory board of key figures from the German media.

One current campaign is to nominate 2024 as the *Year of the News*. In May 2024 Germany will celebrate the 75th anniversary of the German post-war constitution, of which Article 5 focuses on freedom of the press. A representative from UseTheNews stated in an interview for this study that the values that Article 5 represents have never been as much in question as today, as there is a growing number of people who no longer accept traditional journalism. This is why 2024 gives a special mandate to this Year of the News. The campaign is based on four pillars:

> A national advertising campaign, to raise attention to the risks of misinformation;

> A social news desk staffed by 10 young journalists and creators, which will publish one story per day on TikTok, Instagram and YouTube, in a way that is relevant for young people. These young journalists and creators are supported by a selected media partner. The news desk also selects a topic for each week: for example, in mid-February, it was the second anniversary of the war in Ukraine, and this topic was supported by the German broadcaster Tageschau.

> Newscamps, where young people can interact with journalists to find out how fact-checking and debunking takes place. They also learn how they can create videos.

> Local projects, aimed at confronting news deserts and the erosion of local journalistic coverage. The young people participating identify a local topic that is relevant to the future of the region, which makes it relevant to their own future. The young people are coached to act as local reporters, using only their smartphone. The format is paper-free and text-free, using video and audio.

Initiative 1: UseTheNews

What works

The fact that *UseTheNews* is a public-private partnership is key in terms of its success in gaining partners and cooperation across the German media landscape.

Fundraising was identified as a key challenge, as although everyone says that it is important to fight misinformation, it is very difficult to secure financial backing.

The impact of AI was seen as both a help and a hindrance in the project. It has proven helpful to detect fakes, but at a general level has led to worsening media literacy due to the target audience of this MLI (young people) distrusting the use of AI in journalistic media, and to what extent it has been used, which is not always made clear.

What works in particular is engaging young people and treating them as equal partners, rather than subjecting them to top-down initiatives.

Transparency is also key – one of the main elements of this project is that it opens up the process of newspaper editorial conferences to young people so that they can follow the process of newsgathering, thus demystifying it. Young people can then use these tools and create news themselves.

Understanding use of social media such as TikTok, which was a focal point of this project, is very important as this is the main destination in terms of the information and news consumption of young people. If this can be coupled with serious journalistic messages, this would be a successful way of raising awareness of young people: getting their attention and then using their attention to get the message across.

Monitoring and evaluation practices

Feedback from the pilot projects that UseTheNews organised in 2023 was very good. These included the News Literacy Lab, which brought together interdisciplinary teams in the field of media, the Open News Education project, offering training materials for teachers teaching news skills in schools, and NewZee-Community, a space for young people to exchange and participate on the topic[409]. There will also be a webinar for senior editors to explain how they run individual projects.

For the Year of the News, both quantitative KPIs (e.g., how many young people have been reached) and qualitative KPIs (e.g., to what extent are they willing to engage by sharing and participating and showing overall active engagement) have been put into place. Focus groups and interviews will be held throughout the year and a report will be published in December 2024, which will make an overall judgement about the success of the project and set out some recommendations.

Contact

Website: https://www.usethenews.de/en

Initiative 2: Pre-bunking campaign

Overview of measure

Led by Jigsaw[410] (a unit within Google), this campaign aims to tackle the tactics behind misinformation to help social media users protect themselves against harmful content. In Germany, the aim was to help educate German audiences about three of these manipulation techniques commonly used to spread disinformation in their country: decontextualisation, fearmongering, and whataboutism[411]. The campaign focused on one technique per video.

Implementation

In Germany, the campaign lasted 6 weeks and Correktiv media association was a cooperation partner in this as a fact-checking expert. They contributed to the scripts of the videos[412] that were shared as ads on YouTube, Instagram and Facebook and also created a landing page with more information on factchecking and disinformation for people to click through to at the end of the videos.

Approximately 6 million people – estimated by Google to be over half of the online audience on each platform – watched the videos in Germany over the 6 weeks. However, only approximately 20,000 people clicked through to the landing page created by Correktiv, which was viewed by Correktiv as low, especially given the effort and resources that had gone into creating this landing page.

Google estimates that it reached 58% of YouTube users in Germany aged 18–54 and 54% of users on Facebook and Instagram, respectively.

What works

The MLI was successful in providing information to people who were not expecting to learn about disinformation/had no prior knowledge on the topic. However, people who knew the topic better found the campaign less relevant and not as effective.

There were many people working on the campaign in Germany, and from the Correktiv experience of creating the landing page, this was not so efficient. This is due to human and time resources being expended in differing opinions on details such as the format and look of a page ultimately that was only viewed by a very small proportion of the participants targeted by the campaign[413]. At the same time, local partnerships have been recognised as a key component to the relevance and effectiveness of the campaign by Google and such partnerships will be continued and strengthened in future MLIs[414].

From the campaign website, it was noted that in Germany, easily translated concepts performed better than those that did not translate as easily into German. For example, the video on fearmongering, which translates in German to Panikmache, was most successful, whereas decontextualisation and "whataboutism" are more technical terms that the population may not as readily understand. This means that some extra work will need to be done to ensure that the terminology used translates well into the language of the target country, in this case Germany.

Initiative 2: Pre-bunking campaign

Monitoring and evaluation practices

Google followed up on the campaign by sending a survey to people who watched the videos after 48 hours to see what information they had retained and evaluate how many more Germans were now able to correctly identify manipulation techniques online.

The survey asked viewers, and a control group who had not seen the prebunking video, to identify a manipulation technique being used in a sample social media post. The limitations of this method are that it does not necessarily indicate the extent to which individuals may fall victim to manipulation techniques in the future, however given the length and style of the videos, a more rigorous evaluation method of the MLI's success in its objective would have been disproportionate[415].

The results of the survey showed that, on average, viewers were 5.4% better at identifying any of the three manipulation techniques than those who had not seen the videos. It found that the fearmongering video consistently improved viewers' ability to detect examples of fearmongering by between 4.5% and 8% compared with those who hadn't seen the video. Similarly, those who had seen the videos were between 3.8% and 5.8% better at identifying whataboutism and between 4.2% and 6.2% better at spotting decontextualisation.

In terms of effectiveness by age group, Google notes that viewers between 25 and 34 were over 10% more likely to be able to identify misinformation techniques after seeing the "whataboutism" video, whereas the improvement for those between 18 and 34 was 7.1%. This suggests that more education about online manipulation is needed for younger audiences[416].

Contact

Website: https://jigsaw.google.com/

Initiative 3: Teen fact-checking network

Overview of measure

The Teen fact-checking network was originally a project put together by MediaWise, which is an initiative created by the American Journalism Poynter Institute and which has been running successfully for several years in the US (since 2019).

DPA chose teenagers aged 14-17 living in different towns in Germany to be trained by professional fact-checkers and create videos for their peers to explain step by step how they discover misinformation.

By sharing these tips with the viewers of the videos in an accessible and relevant format, the idea is that young people will feel more confident when looking for information online themselves and know how to fact-check, particularly on Instagram, YouTube and TikTok.

The main stakeholders involved were DPA and the US partners of the Teen Fact-Checking Network (TCFN), which provided DPA with the blueprint of the project, a media literacy guide and support throughout the implementation.

Implementation

The Teen Fact-Checking Network was launched in Germany in January 2023 and built up by the DPA fact-checking team. The initiative ran for 8 months, from January 2023 until August 2023, and was financed by Google. The aim was to understand how different countries and cultures would respond to this MLI, especially as this was opportunity to teach teenagers about fact-checking in a private setting as opposed to in school. The key actions (namely engaging 10 teenagers from all over Germany to create videos about fact-checking) were pre-defined in the blueprint of the project shared by the US partners. However, the content of the videos created by the teenagers was more free. They were able to choose from a list of topics and create their content. This was then reviewed by the project managers in Germany first, and then the project managers from the US to give additional advice on what to include.

> ❯ Where relevant, outline how funding from grant organisations was operationalised (e.g. Google)
> ❯ Summarise how partnerships between key actors were carried out

Initiative 3: Teen fact-checking network

What works

The project was able to engage 10 teenagers who produced created videos for their peers to explain step by step how they discover misinformation. All the targets of the project were met, and the feedback by the participants was very positive, based on a written feedback questionnaire and the feedback collected during the final conference.

Hindering factors include the short and rather inflexible time frame of the project (8 months). The deadline of the videos produced by the teens coincided thus with their exam period. Ideally, the participants would have identified and chosen the fake news themselves, but due to time constraints a list was provided from which they could choose. In order to engage them more actively, more time would be needed to teach the participants how to identify fake news themselves and regular meetings to discuss the progress. Communication primarily relied on email, which proved to be less effective, if not the least effective, when engaging with teenagers. In the future a different communication channel that is more frequently checked would be preferred. More in-person conferences or seminars would also be beneficial, as there was a six-month gap between meetings with project leads and the teens. Finding teens also proved challenging, with many reached through their parents due to DPA's limited recognition among teenagers. In contrast, fact-checking networks in India and Brazil received a higher number of applicants, likely influenced by cultural differences in perception. In Germany, participation seemed more like an additional activity rather than an opportunity or privilege, despite participants being compensated. With DPA's increased presence on platforms like TikTok and Instagram, future recruitment efforts may be more successful.

Monitoring and evaluation practices

Since the launch of the broader TFCN initiative in 2019 in the US, the Teen Fact-Checking Network videos have been viewed more than 12 million times[417].

There are currently no publicly available evaluations or specific findings from the initiative in Germany.

An overview of the use Google and its partners have made of monitoring and evaluation.

The main (e.g. skills/resource/practical) challenges to undertaking monitoring and evaluation in the context of the initiative (and country context) and how these could be addressed.

What further research, monitoring or tracking might be undertaken to better measure the ML outcomes.

Contact
Website: https://www.dpa.com/de/faktencheck-teens

🇮🇪 Ireland

Initiative 1: Be Media Smart Campaign[418]

Overview of measure

Since 2019, the Be Media Smart campaign has encouraged people nationwide to "Stop, Think and Check" that the information they are getting is accurate and reliable. The Be Media Smart website also includes tips for evaluating information, for talking to family or friends who are sharing disinformation and an 'Ask an Expert' section.

This campaign is a great example of how cross-sector collaboration can achieve results. The 2023 iteration of the campaign showed significant reach, with the radio campaign reaching over 3.1 million listeners on a weekly basis[419] supported by 33 radio stations. The TV campaign has reached over 5.3 million people to date[420]. Online, there were over 81,000 impressions across all platforms and the TikTok/The Journal initiative resulted in over 6.4 million video views. For the period 24 October to 30 November 2023, there were 6,043 page views of the Be Media Smart website and users were up 74% to 3,203.

A part of the core funding has been provided by Coimisiún na Meán (CnAM)[421], supported on an ad-hoc basis by one or two other core MLI members, notably Google in 2019 and 2023. Nearly all other efforts have been covered 'in kind' by MLI members who play to their own particular strengths.

Implementation

The Be Smart Campaign uses simple messages that encourage individuals in Ireland to take a moment to consider and verify the reliability and accuracy of the information they encounter in their reading, viewing, or listening activities. The campaign, delivered across TV, radio, online, and the press, is supported by free airtime, editorial, online ad credit, social media activity, and events from a wide range of Media Literacy Ireland members. It has been broadcasted on all major networks in Ireland in both English and Irish. To further spread the campaign messages, Media Literacy Ireland has been mobilising its member network, calling on everyone to share Be Media Smart messages in their own channels, and members create opportunities to collaborate around the campaign messages.

In 2020, the campaign evolved to focus on accurate and reliable information about Covid-19 and in 2021 the initiative focussed on the need to make informed choices about the Covid-19 vaccination based on accurate and reliable information. More recently, in 2023, the Be Media Smart Campaign evolved to include a community training programme in conjunction with EDMO Ireland to empower teachers, librarians and community leaders with the necessary knowledge, tools, techniques, and resources they need to deliver a media literacy workshop in their communities.[422]

Examples of Be Smart Campaign messages
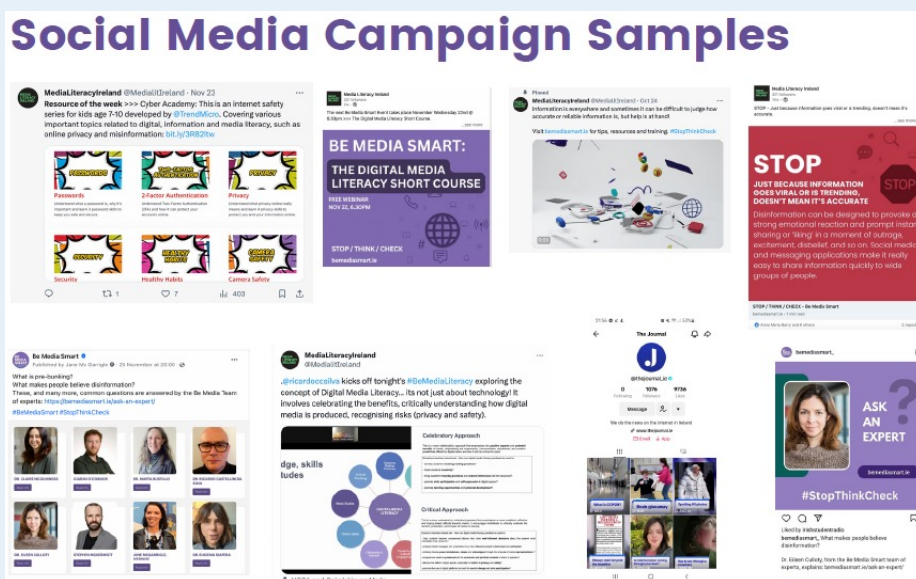
Initiative 1: Be Media Smart Campaign[418]

What works

Since 2019 the campaign has evolved with different MLI members providing different types of support at different times. What is clear is that the support of local radio has been a significant factor in the success of getting the message out. Local voices on local radio enjoy high levels of trust in Ireland and the campaign was supported by 31 local radio stations and community media outlets in 2023. Of particular note in 2023 was also an initiative between TikTok and The Journal news publication, where the tone was very different to the main campaign and adapted to youth, with the core message staying the same.

Encouraging MLI members to take the campaign message and deliver it in whatever they feel is the most appropriate way has paid dividends. The original capital cost of the Be Media Smart campaign in 2019 amounted to less than €20,000. Meanwhile, the financial value of the campaign, in terms of the support provided by MLI members, for the same year was estimated at over €300,000, demonstrating a clear cost-effectiveness and how buy-in or commitment of members can be utilised to distribute a message nationally far beyond the reach of the initial project budget.

In essence, the development of the Be Media Smart campaign reflects the strength of cross-sectoral collaboration and the commitment of Irish stakeholders to promote media literacy throughout society. The initiative has been noted as best practice, and the concept was adopted and existing assets re-purposed and used in Norway, the Czech Republic, Macedonia, Bosnia, and Estonia – demonstrating how a project can be scaled and replicated in other countries.[423]

Monitoring and evaluation practices

The evaluation and assessment of the initiative focused on understanding its reach and effectiveness across various media platforms. Quantifying the impact of the campaign has been challenging due to the diversity of statistical data from numerous partners but there are strong success indicators from a number of sources (consider also statistics presented in the introduction):

› A nationally representative survey[424] showed that in November 2023, 23% of the adult population reported unprompted recognition of Be Media Smart campaign message (up from 15% in September) and surpassing the typical recall rate of 13% – 17% for similar campaigns.

› 118 community-based leaders, coaches, and librarians were trained to deliver Be Media Smart Workshops in their communities[425], in English and in Irish – and those trainers are currently starting to deliver training independently now.[426]

› The vast majority of attendees who completed a post-training evaluation survey also agreed that after the training two things have improved: their knowledge of media literacy concepts and the disinformation problem (88.5%), and their skills as a media literacy trainer (86.8%). Two thirds of respondents also claimed that they feel confident enough to organise and deliver the media literacy workshop within their communities[427].

In terms of legacy, it has been observed that the Stop, Think, Check message has been adopted by a range of organisations and is being integrated in their own training and outreach programmes in schools and across communities.

Contact

Website: STOP / THINK / CHECK – Be Media Smart

Initiative 2: Barnardos Online Safety Programme[428]

Overview of measure

Supported by Google.org, Barnardos Online Safety Programme offers child-centred workshops to teach children to stay safe online, responding to a need to equip them with essential digital skills and protect them in today's rapidly evolving digital landscape. The programme method is centred around learning four simple rules to help young children become digital citizens – inviting them to be S.T.A.R.s when being online:

> Safe. Be safe online.
> Treat others kindly. Treat people as they would like to be treated.
> Ask for help. Tell a trusted adult (parent, teacher, etc.). Do not keep it to themselves.
> Reach out. Do something if they see someone being treated unkindly.

The primary target for workshops is 3rd and 6th class students, with additional workshops organised for school teachers and staff, as well as evening or morning sessions for parents.

The Barnardos Online Safety Programme is run by Barnardos, a children's charity that protects and supports children and young people in Ireland, with expertise in helping the most vulnerable children.

Implementation

The first edition of the Barnardos Online Safety Programme began in September 2019 when the project embarked on a 4-year plan with the hope of reaching 1000 schools and 75,000 children. In the first pilot year, the plan was to conduct face-to-face consultations with children. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, workshops had to be shifted online, and face-to-face sessions were not possible until the third year of the program. While Barnardo has favoured face-to-face delivery, virtual workshops have remained an option throughout the entire four-year implementation period.

Once a Barnardos trainer arrives in the school, they guide the class through a workshop that puts a spotlight on the four simple rules (see above) and important topics that include:

> Online kindness
> Critical thinking
> Cyberbullying
> Upstanding online
> Safe passwords
> Digital well-being
> Media literacy

While the primary focus of the workshop is on safeguarding against individuals with malicious intentions or those attempting online grooming, it also extends to a broader understanding of online interactions. The workshops are designed to be positive, discussion-focused, and interactive. Typically, they are followed by an online parent session to reinforce messages at home.

With support from Google.org, workshops are offered to schools at a nominal rate of €50 per day, covering four 45-minute classroom sessions. Participating schools also gain access to Be Internet Legends[429], a Google online resource that schools can use to download lessons or play the 'Interland game' together with their class – an online adventure that teaches the key lessons of internet safety through four fun, challenging games.

Initiative 2: Barnardos Online Safety Programme[428]

What works

Since 2019, the Barnardos Online Safety Programme has surpassed its initial goals by more than 100%, reaching out to more than 90,000 elementary school students aged 8 to 12. The shift to online workshops has been observed to be a contributed factor to the wide outreach, as it allows for wider accessibility beyond traditional in-person workshops.

Qualitative findings collected via feedback forms and a survey suggest that schools and children appreciate the sessions and often want the trainer to come back for another session. The impression among trainers is that the workshops are valued and meet a growing demand of equipping young children with online awareness. Parents and teachers have often commented on the significant value they see in shaping children's mindsets to improve their safety.

Project representatives add that a key factor contributing to the programme's success has been its smooth collaboration with Google, which has maintained a high level of involvement and interest throughout the programme period. A funding contract and memorandum of understanding have guided the collaboration, which includes commitments on both sides, including the submissions of annual reports and predetermined milestones. In particular, project representatives have expressed that they appreciate Google's openness and flexibility in testing different approaches in order to meet set objectives. In particular, this helped the project to maintain success throughout the pandemic when courses shifted to being offered online.

The main challenge faced thus far has been how to extend the reach of the programme while working within the constraints of a limited training panel. Transitioning towards more online activities is expected to facilitate access to a larger student population within the resources available.

Lastly – as a testament to its success – there will be an additional round of Barnardo's Online Safety Programme with continued support from Google and the new partners Media Literacy Ireland and Webwise (see section 2 below). This version will run from 2024 to 2027 and will aim to offer assistance to older students (12-18 years of age) who often are more likely to become victims of online dangers, including a new crisis incident response to significant online incidents (eg. self-destructive behaviour, cyberbullying or grooming). With the intention of scaling up impact, the new programme will prioritise digital workshops over traditional face-to-face methods, particularly considering the increased willingness of stakeholders to utilise online tools in the post-COVID-19 era. Face-to-face sessions will remain an option but will be reduced in frequency and tailored to populations with limited digital access.

Monitoring and evaluation practices

To assess the impact at the individual level, the programme has been using a pre-workshop questionnaire followed by a post-workshop survey. These surveys have provided insights into the knowledge participants have acquired and also offered them the opportunity to express themselves on other topics they wish to learn more about or raise any additional questions they may have. Sessions with parents have also provided valuable information, sometimes revealing differences between what parents and children communicate and offering useful points of comparison.

Project representatives further highlight that some aspects have been difficult to evaluate, notably the efficiency and relevance of measures. In the next programme, the transition to digital platforms is expected to improve the measurability of outcomes, and a key focus will be on incorporating the perspectives of young people and making them central to the production of the resources they use.

Looking forward, the programme also aims to establish a more robust feedback loop. A data-driven approach will be all the more important as activities become more digital. Strengthening the ability to gather data will enable better-informed decisions and ensure a more comprehensive understanding of what works over time.

Contact

Website: Online Safety Programme – Barnardos

Initiative 3: Webwise[430]

Overview of measure

Webwise promotes safer, better internet use through awareness raising and education initiatives targeting teachers, children, young people and parents. The organisation is a member of the InSafe Network, MLI Steering Committee and a member of the European TeaMLit network.

Since 2008, Webwise has been part of the Safer Internet Ireland consortium and has partnered with ISPCC Childline, Hotline.ie and the National Parents Council (NPC) under the umbrella of the Irish Safer Internet Centre to provide a range of complementary online safety services. The Irish SIC is under the co-ordination of the Department of Justice, Cybercrime Division.

Webwise is funded by the European Union and co-funded by the Department of Education.

Implementation

The core activity of Webwise is to create and share resources, and provide free teaching materials for primary and secondary schools to aid teachers in incorporating internet safety and digital citizenship into teaching and learning. These materials cover topics such as digital media literacy, cyberbullying, image-sharing, and social media. The organisation also provides information, advice, and tools to parents to support their engagement in their children's online lives and coordinates Safer Internet day in Ireland.

Additionally, Webwise is engaged in a number of ongoing initiatives and collaborations with the objective of promoting a positive and inclusive digital environment, prioritising the safety and protection of children.

› As one of 31 Safer Internet Centres of the InSafe-InHope Networks, the Irish Safer Internet Centre contributes to the Better Internet for Kids (BIK) core service platform to share resources, services and practices between the European Safer Internet Centres and advice and information about a better internet to the general public. As part of this mission, Webwise was part of coordinating the Safer Internet Day on the topic of "Tech in our World" on February 6, 2024. This theme reflected on significant changes in technology consumption among youth, including the rise of generative AI and regulatory shifts such as the Digital Services Act (DSA).

› Webwise fosters youth empowerment in internet safety through initiatives like the Webwise Youth Advisory Panel and the SID Ambassador Programme, where teenagers from across Ireland contribute to developing awareness-raising resources and campaigns, including addressing cyberbullying. The SID Ambassador Programme, led by Webwise Youth Panellists, supports post-primary students in leading internet safety campaigns in their schools and communities, with training provided to empower them to make Safer Internet Day a success nationwide.

› Webwise is part of Oide Technology in Education, part of Oide, a new support service funded by the Department of Education. Oide Technology in Education promotes and supports the integration of ICT in teaching and learning in first and second level schools.

› The work of Webwise aligns to pillar 3 of the Digital Strategy for Schools, supports the Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying and aligns to the 3 pillars of the European Better Internet for Kids+ Strategy.

Initiative 3: Webwise[430]

What works

Webwise leverages strong collaboration and the active involvement of educators and young people throughout Ireland. In this context, it is worth noting that Safer Internet Day attracted more than 200,000 children and youth to attend almost 750 events registered around Ireland in 2024.

Webwise also credits its outreach to a well-executed awareness strategy bolstered by support from the Department of Education. This includes national radio, online, and cinema campaigns aimed at informing schools about the availability of their free services. Additionally, Webwise considers its success in awareness raising and targeting to be significant, with a strong presence on social media and an engaged network of teachers.

Given the growing need for media literacy awareness, a limitation highlighted by Webwise is the availability of in-house resources, both in terms of funding and staff. Beyond additional resources to realise their mission, the organisation would like to see more research on media literacy in Irish school environments and society, more training for educators and parents as well as expanded support for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

Monitoring and evaluation practice

Webwise employs various evaluation methods to gather feedback on their resources and courses, including surveys with teachers and organising focus groups for online course participants. These evaluations assess factors like understanding digital citizenship concepts and how users respond to developed materials. A representative for Webwise interviewed in the context of this study recognised the necessity for further improvement in the area of monitoring and evaluation practices.

Contact

Website: About us – (webwise.ie)

Italy

Initiative 1: Empowering Schools in Self-Regulation of Media and Information Literacy processes (EMILE)

Overview of measure

Launched in January 2023 and running for 18 months until June 2024, the EMILE project tackles the crucial issue of improving levels of media literacy among young people. The project, primarily implemented in Italy and Finland through voluntary participation by schools, equips both teachers and students with media literacy tools. It addresses two key challenges: firstly, boosting teacher confidence and competence in media literacy education. Secondly, empowering students to navigate the information overload they face online by strengthening their underlying cognitive processes.

EMILE achieves this through interdisciplinary professional development programs for teachers, empowering them to broaden the scope of media and information literacy in their classrooms. Simultaneously, the project supports students directly by strengthening their cognitive processes for critical analysis of information. The initiative is currently being tested with teachers and students in lower secondary school (11-13 years old) and upper primary school, with adaptations for younger age groups being explored. This focus on empowering young minds ensures they become responsible and informed consumers of media in the digital age.

Initiative 1: Empowering Schools in Self-Regulation of Media and Information Literacy processes (EMILE)

Implementation[431]

EMILE employs a multi-pronged approach to achieve its goals. "Elli's World", a game-based toolkit with versions in Italian, English, and Finnish, support students in effectively accessing and critically analysing media content. This engaging platform incorporates tasks related to media literacy and executive function training, aiming to enhance students' self-regulation processes.

Images of the adapted Elli's World game which is designed to empower students' cognitive processes to think critically and assess the trustworthiness of information.

Meanwhile, teachers benefit from interdisciplinary professional development programs that equip them with the necessary competence and confidence to integrate media literacy into their curricula. These programs provide access to research-based materials on critical information literacy and practical teaching resources that can be utilised both during and beyond the project's duration. Additionally, teachers are granted access to a diverse set of resources, including a series of 9 videos designed to strengthen young students' ability to read critically and evaluate the credibility of online information, along with classroom materials and teaching resources for pre- and post-game use.

As part of its activities, the EMILE project consistently produces and publishes regular Education Briefs on the project's website and Facebook page to enhance public awareness of the importance of self-regulation processes in effective media literacy education. Furthermore, all project activities and results are continuously disseminated online and are available in English.

According to key stakeholders consulted, the success of EMILE hinges on fostering strong partnerships between diverse organisations. The University of Florence, serving as the lead partner, manages the project and focuses on student-oriented elements. The University of Tampere spearheads the development of teacher training components, while the expertise of Anastasis Cooperative Association lies in creating digital tools and resources. Finally, the American University of Romania leverages its data analysis expertise to contribute to project evaluation and monitoring. This strategic collaboration ensures that each partner's unique strengths contribute to the project's overall success.

Initiative 1: Empowering Schools in Self-Regulation of Media and Information Literacy processes (EMILE)

What works

The success of the project can be attributed to several critical factors. Based on feedback gathered by the project team, strong partner preparation played a pivotal role, as each partner brought a robust foundation in both theory and practical experience to the project. Adequate funding further fuelled the project's success by enabling the activation of necessary resources crucial for execution.

While the project encountered certain hurdles related to the dynamic recruitment landscape in Italy, it achieved a commendable 70% success rate in finding suitable external personnel. This approach presented occasional potential challenges in terms of team cohesion due to the absence of prior relationships among individuals, sometimes amplified by the limited project timeframe.

Monitoring and evaluation practices

The EMILE project employs a rigorous and innovative approach to evaluate its effectiveness. Recognising that interventions may not universally apply, the project goes beyond simply measuring success and seeks to understand under what conditions it works. This is achieved through a psychological methodological approach with valid and reliable assessments.

Importantly, the project distinguishes itself by capturing not only its impact but also its effectiveness, which allows for a deeper understanding of its true value. To achieve this, the project employs a pre and post-comparison with a control group using a class-randomised control trial. This involves randomly assigning classes to the experimental or control group, conducting initial tests and ongoing in-itinerant assessments, and utilising parallel classes with statistical analysis to identify any significant differences between the groups. While the final evaluation is not standardised, it has been validated through pilot groups.

Teacher assessment is another unique aspect of the study, acknowledging that teachers, like students, have distinct goals. While students aim for improved media literacy skills, teachers seek empowerment and increased self-efficacy in delivering media literacy education. The project incorporates teacher satisfaction tests and self-efficacy assessments to evaluate educator confidence in their abilities. This attention to teacher development is a valuable contribution, as it recognises their crucial role in the project's effectiveness.

The project's monitoring and evaluation practices generate regular data, which is collected in interim reports and shared with funding partners. These partners subsequently showcase the project's successful results through various channels, including their website and relevant events.

Contact

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Initiative 2: Be Internet Awesome (Vivi Internet al Meglio) by Fondazione Mondo Digitale

Overview of measure

Be Internet Awesome Italy (Vivi Internet al Meglio)[432], a Google-backed initiative, aims to foster digital citizenship and media literacy skills in Italy at the national level through a combination of education, awareness-raising campaigns, engaging activities and grants supporting media literacy efforts leveraging the Be Internet Awesome open sourced curriculum. Launched in 2018 and ongoing, this collaborative project equips individuals of all ages, from children and students to parents, grandparents, and teachers, with the skills to navigate the online world safely and responsibly. By promoting responsible technology use, critical thinking, and online safety awareness, Be Internet Awesome Italy aims to empower Italians of all generations to embrace the digital world positively and constructively.

Implementation

The project encompasses a range of key activities aimed at promoting digital media literacy and online safety. These activities include specialised webinars for the elderly, addressing topics such as fake news, data privacy, and online security, as well as webinar sessions conducted for both teachers and students, focusing on various aspects of digital literacy.

The project has produced a number of tools, aiming at enhancing media literacy among various age groups. This includes the book and board game "Interland", which is designed to educate and entertain while fostering digital awareness, and a quiz designed to assess parents' knowledge and skills in addressing media literacy topics with their children. Targeting the younger generations, young YouTubers have further created videos to champion responsible online behaviour.

These outputs have stemmed from the collaboration of five different organisations, namely Fondazione Mondo Digitale, Polizia Postale e delle Comunicazioni, Altroconsumo, Anteas, and Generazioni Connesse. Each organisation has contributed to different aspects of the project, including the production of outputs, their dissemination, and involvement of target groups in output preparation, effectively collaborating. In particular, Fondazione Mondo Digitale leads a media literacy project with support from Google.org that leverages the BIA curriculum, coordinating training activities across Italy and facilitating communication among organisations activities and facilitating communication among partners. Polizia Postale contributes to training events, Altroconsumo provides practical advice, and Anteas focuses on activities for the elderly.

Google, through its philanthropic arm Google.org, supports the expansion of media literacy efforts led by non profit organisations working in this space such as Fondazione Mondo Digitale and Anteas. The funding, allocated for a two-year cycle, ensures the continuity of the project. The operationalisation involves the implementation of various activities and the adaptation of the activities, including play-based initiatives, tailored content for different age groups, and adherence to key performance indicators. This partnership model effectively supports reaching target groups and communicating the project's goals.

Initiative 2: Be Internet Awesome (Vivi Internet al Meglio) by Fondazione Mondo Digitale

What works

As of April 2021, Be Internet Awesome Italy, including activities supported by Google.org led by Fondazione Mondo Digitale and Anteas, have reached a significant number of individuals, including:

> 80 FMD facilitators
> 32,000 teachers (12,000 trained in person)
> 10,000 parents
> 3,000 grandparents
> 240,000 students reached through trained teachers
> 25,000 students directly trained

In 2020, it reached[433]:

> 7,242 teachers
> 3,907 parents
> 144,840 students
> 10,000 teachers and 2,000 were reached by the public campaign of that year

Showcasing:

> 5 formative modules
> 115 webinars
> 8 Interland Labs

Only in 2021, the project reached[434]:

> 4,247 teachers
> 2,946 parents
> 17,994 students
> 228 individuals over 60 years old
> 84,940 students were formed indirectly
> 140 schools were reached

It has shared:

> 5,000 copies of the game
> 4,500 copies of the book

The project's focus on media literacy, a widely recognized need, has facilitated its widespread adoption in schools. The inclusion of media literacy as a compulsory teaching pathway has further supported scalability. Additionally, the environment with schools enthusiastically welcoming the initiative creates a positive environment for its implementation. Word-of-mouth promotion among schools has further amplified its reach. Regional school offices are reported to play a crucial role in engaging schools and acting as intermediaries.

According to key stakeholders consulted for this media literacy initiative, all these factors have contributed to the project's easy communication, widespread acceptance by schools and teachers, and overall success. However, engaging parents proved challenging due to perceived information overload and redundancy around online safety. The widespread discussion might lead some parents to feel they already possess sufficient knowledge, hindering their engagement with the initiative. This emphasises the need for future efforts to focus on tailored strategies that sensitise, train, and educate parents in a way that directly addresses their specific concerns and needs, and carefully targeted methods to engage and recruit parents including peer-based approaches.

Initiative 2: Be Internet Awesome (Vivi Internet al Meglio) by Fondazione Mondo Digitale

Figure 8: Snapshot from the Be Internet Awesome handbook (Italy)
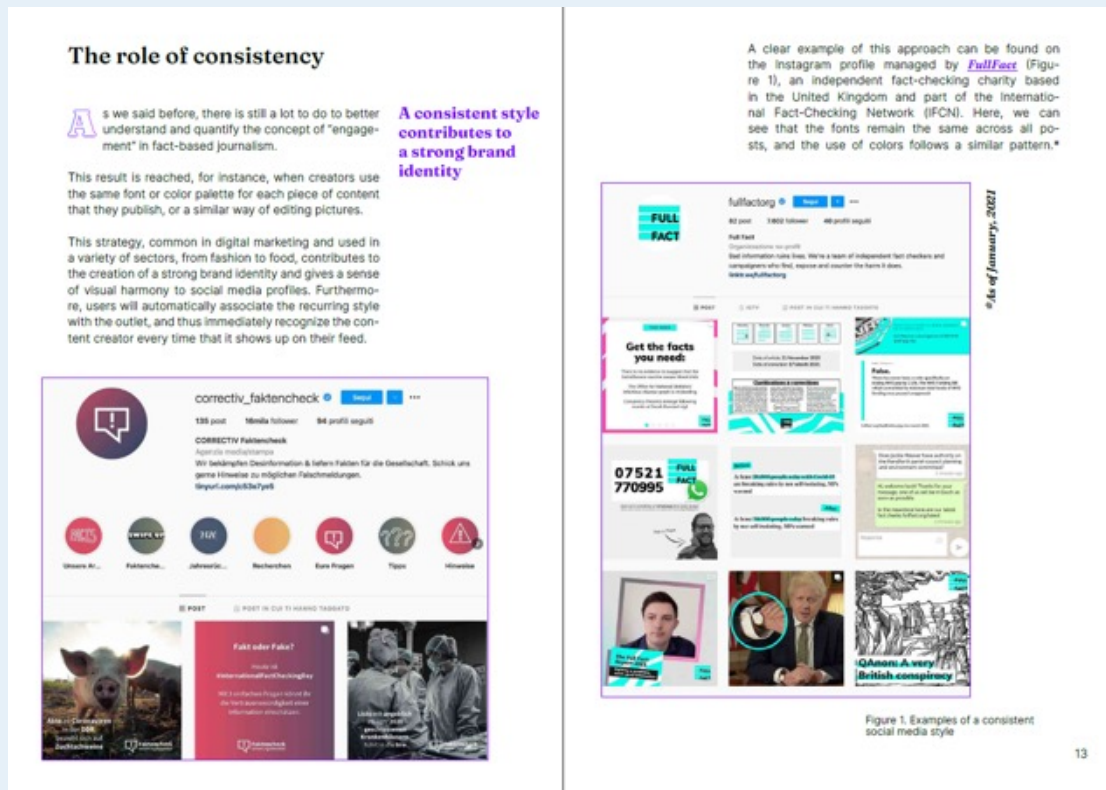
This handbook contains best practices and case studies from several countries. It showcases at least 3 success stories and practical tips for 7 different categories of engagement tools, being graphics and images, quizzes, podcasts, newsletters, stories, videos and messaging apps. In addition, a website (now archived) displayed project results and statistics in an accessible format for the wider public.

Initiative 2: Be Internet Awesome (Vivi Internet al Meglio) by Fondazione Mondo Digitale

Monitoring and evaluation practices

The Be Internet Awesome Italy initiative employs a two-fold monitoring and evaluation approach, using post-training questionnaires and training platform data to gather feedback. All collected data is then incorporated into the evaluation report and the results are published on the partnership website.

Fondazione Mondo Digitale, leading the project with support from Google.org, publishes its Digital Responsibility report with a series of qualitative and quantitative questions used to assess the impact of the initiative. These digital responsibility reports show yearly data (reported in the What Works section) of the degree of effectiveness. In 2020, 91% of the teachers and the parents affirmed their knowledge regarding internet risk has increased after the project, 93% of the teachers and 90% of the parents believe their ability to educate pupils on online safety has increased, 95% of the teachers and 96% of the parents want to spend time on the topics with students and children.[435]

In 2021, these percentages have increased, with 96% of the teachers and parents affirming their knowledge regarding internet risk has increased after the project, 94% of the teachers and 91% of the parents believe their ability to educate pupils on online safety has increased, 97% of the teachers and 95% of the parents want to spend time on the topics with students and childre.[436]

Both reports underline the importance of regularly updating and contextualizing the content provided to teachers and parents with the latest data and trends. Additionally, the project has acknowledged a need to find ways to systematically gather and validate data regarding the academic progress of the primary recipients, namely the students.

Expanding and enhancing the project with a more extensive and comprehensive analysis of media literacy development within the target groups would greatly enhance the initiative's precision in targeting. Additionally, assessing media literacy levels regarding the discussed topics both before and after the intervention would offer a more objective assessment of the project's effectiveness, diverging from subjective evaluations. Nevertheless, these subjective assessments still provide insight into participants' increased willingness to engage in discussions about specific subjects following exposure to the project.

Contact

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Initiative 3: Fact-Checking Engagement Project

Overview of measure

The Fact-Checking Engagement Project aims to systematically analyse the current state of the fact-checking community's engagement efforts.

Despite the community's growth, a learning curve is presented to fully understand the most effective formats for diverse audiences. The intention is to regularly update the handbook with stories on engagement tools and techniques. This handbook, combined with a website (now archived) aims to inform the fact-checking community of the progress and the best practices of the community, providing with a practical tool to increase fact-checkers effectiveness. The number of fact-checking outlets has increased, from 44 in 2014 to 290 in 2020. Operating in the information ecosystem means dealing with a multitude of stakeholders and narratives, where the quality of the outputs and the increase in the engagement are paramount for achieving aspirations for reach and engagement.

The Fact-Checking Engagement Project specifically concentrates on exploring how IFCN members leverage online engagement tools with their audiences. This focus reflects a contemporary and predominant trend within the fact-checking community.

What works

Key stakeholders noted that the website was a strength of the project, as it provided a window for the fact-checking community and facilitated the exchange of good practices. The outreach process and the 'global' focus provided universal suggestions alongside access to the project's media tools.

Fact-checkers have been increasingly popular in providing de-bunking tools against fake news and disinformation. The concept of engagement has become central in the news ecosystem. By providing suggestions to the fact checkers on how to be more effective in using engagement tools, this project has been successful at showcasing good practices and re-adaptable campaign tools.

As an example, from the interviews conducted on the creation of better graphics and images, trends have been identified by analysing fact-checkers from the United Kingdom (*FullFact*), Colombia (Colombiacheck), Nigeria (*Dubava*), Germany (*Correctiv*) and Italy (*Pagella Politica*) on style consistency (Figure 1), on the importance of short videos by analysing profiles from Spain (*Newtral*), Venezuela (*Cotejo*) but also other countries and some big US fact-checking outlet (*Politifact*) on the creation of a 'brand' identity such as the Truth-O-Meter, a rating system of the outlet for different news.

Monitoring and evaluation practices

This project aims to augment the effectiveness of fact-checkers in a multidimensional ecosystem. The handbook does not have monitoring and evaluation data, nor any data has been traced on the website. The context of analysis, being international, provides solutions that in the end are not context-dependent, especially when navigating diverse information ecosystems and markets.
Further research might extend beyond monitoring the take-up of the resources among the fact-checking community to gathering systematic feedback on satisfaction with the resources and how to better capture and understand the ways in which the resources have been utilised (and with what results). Quantifying the impact and track numbers of views, downloads of the handbook (as well as providing new insights considering the impact of AI) would also be beneficial.

Contact

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Poland

Initiative 1: Be Internet Awesome (*Asy Internetu*)

Overview of measure

As seen in the Italian context above, Be Internet Awesome is an open sourced Media Literacy program and curriculum created by Google that is leveraged by various non profits organisation leading media literacy efforts. In Poland, it is leveraged by Foundation Szkola z Klasa (School with Class), a leading Polish NGO in the education sphere. The project was first introduced in 2018 and is currently operating regionally, with activities in a few Central European Countries including Latvia, Ukraine, Moldova, Lithuania, Romania, Greece, and Croatia.

The main activity of Szkoła z Klasą's Be Internet Awesome initiative in Poland is the support of the teachers on all levels of education, with a particular focus on elementary schools. It was implemented in response to the emerging evidence that Polish schools fail to educate youth with digital citizenship competences. While initially aimed at a general population of students, there are currently several strands addressing the needs of particular vulnerable groups, most notably: the youngest children in preschools, neurodiverse youth, learners with hearing and sight impairments, the Roma population and refugees from Ukraine. The foundation emphasises the need to change the philosophy of media education from a focus on tools to a focus on critical thinking.

Implementation

The main activity within the initiative is the training of teachers. The foundation shares a belief that media literacy can only be obtained in a long-lasting process rather than one-off training, therefore it is more effective to target teachers, who cooperate with the students on a daily basis. In the 5 years since the launch of the programme, over 300,000 children were indirectly supported. The Foundation follows the cascade or snowball model of recruitment, with recommendations of past participants being a key driving force. Standard training is based on 12 training hours and is open to teachers of all subjects and levels of education. Teachers who complete the training are eligible for a certificate of attendance.

Evaluation of the programme is performed by opinions and feedback collected after the sessions. Participants are usually asked to fill the standardised feedback form 2-3 months after the training. The feedback focuses on lessons learned and practices implemented in the classroom by the given teacher.

Training of teachers are complemented with several other actions. In particular, the Foundation prepared a Polish translation of the Be Internet Awesome handbook, now available to the teachers. The handbook is supported with additional materials, addressed to some special needs, e.g. materials for ICT teachers or on the teaching of Polish language.

This Be Internet Awesome initiative is supported by a Google.org grant grant and is based on almost 20 years of the Foundation's experience in supporting Polish schools and teachers.

Initiative 1: Be Internet Awesome (*Asy Internetu*)

What works

Participants' feedback shows that teachers are generally satisfied with the programme. They also express the high demand for education on these topics and insufficient skills to tackle students' problems. Given the cascade model of recruitment, such interest is a key factor facilitating the implementation of the initiative. It is worth mentioning that a minor but significant fraction of participants rate their skills as lower after the trainings, finding out that they tended to highly overrate their knowledge prior to the training.

Key factors hindering the implementation of the programme are related to the current social situation of the teachers. Most importantly, after an ineffective school strike in 2019 and a long period of remote education due to the pandemic, many teachers in Poland suffer burnout and do not want to engage in any extracurricular activities.

Furthermore, the influx of refugees after Russia's invasion of Ukraine created several new problems for schools. Pre-war 16% of Polish teachers reported never having met a single foreign student. Misunderstandings are often conflict-generating.

Monitoring and evaluation practices

Monitoring and evaluation practices focus on learning outcomes of the teachers who participate in the trainings. There is little information on the outcomes gained by the students whose teachers took part in the programme. The only way to assess that impact is feedback from teachers on their students' performance (which may sometimes be seen as subjective or misleading). Direct evaluations of the students in schools would be very useful, though there are two key obstacles: firstly, NGOs have very limited access to schools and can only reach students with the voluntary help of the teachers or headmasters. Secondly, there is a need to develop tools to measure media literacy skills, as there is currently a lack of such tools.

Contact

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Initiative 2: Fact-checking Academy (Akademia Fact-Checkingu)

Overview of measure

Fact-checking Academy is one of the two pillars of the Demagog Foundation, a leading Polish NGO in the area of media literacy. Demagog Foundation was founded in 2014 as a fact-checking organisation. Its portal, demagog.pl, is the oldest and one of the largest Polish fact-checking websites, that claim to have debunked over 2000 fake news and have verified over 5000 statements by public figures. Academy was founded in 2017 in order to utilise Foundation's experience in fact-checking and increase the media literacy levels in Poland.

There are two target groups of the programme: students in senior years of elementary schools and high schools and teachers, with a special reference to the class tutors. The initiative is labelled as a "helpful hand in combating misinformation" and responds to the needs expressed by the target groups.

Initiative 2: Fact-checking Academy (Akademia Fact-Checkingu)

Implementation

The fact-checking Academy is based on three types of key activities: training of teachers, workshops for students and an education platform with ready-to-use materials. Occasionally, the Foundation organises workshops addressed to other target groups. Most notably, in cooperation with Towarzystwo Inicjatyw Twórczych Ę, NGO, the foundation ran workshops for seniors in four Polish cities (Rybnik, Rzeszów, Wałbrzych and Warszawa). Demagog also organises commercial trainings for entrepreneurs on open source intelligence and the verification of information.

Trainings for teachers are organised in small groups in four thematic areas: "Fake news and other types of false information"; "Fact-checker's toolbox"; "Credible sources of information"; and "How to react on false information in a conversation in the web". Trainings are not limited to teachers in particular fields of study or specific education levels, though the groups are most often recruited from class tutors and teachers of computer science and Polish language classes.

Workshops for the students are organised in the form of gamification. During the workshops, students have the opportunity to play a specially designed game titled "Fakescape" – a simulation of a presidential elections in Poland, where the students are exposed to several types of fake news and misinformation and learn how to identify and verify key pieces of information. The Foundation's methodology is rooted in the belief that learning-by-doing is the most effective way to acquire the skills required to navigate a complex media landscape.

In parallel, the initiative's educational platform[437] collects various materials for teachers, such as lesson scenarios on misinformation and fake news or inspirational materials for students. There are also 5 online trainings available and an educational game titled "Cool that you know"[438] that helps users check their knowledge and skills on misinformation.

All the key activities of the Fact-Checking Academy were designed in close cooperation with stakeholders and target groups. The first stage was the focus group interviews with teachers. The Foundation also prepared the report "Critical mind"[439] on the state-of-art of media literacy in Polish schools. The conclusions of the report were reflected in the workshops.

The Fact-Checking Academy has diverse sources of funding. The foundation receives numerous grants from public institutions and Big Tech companies and runs a fundraising campaign to raise money from supporters. The foundation is not-for-profit, but fees cover the costs.

What works

The Fact-checking Academy is built on the experiences of the Demagog Foundation. It also helped to leverage a pre-existing and widely recognised fact-checking portal to launch the activities as a significant number of teachers who participated in the Academy were already users of the platform.

Polarisation and political context are two of the most important factors hindering implementation in recent years. In 2021, the Polish Ministry of Education started to discuss a new law on education, commonly known as "Lex Czarnek". According to the proposed regulation, NGOs would require a written permission from the politically appointed superintendent, each time it organises any activity in a school, whereas teachers could face sanctions for any kind of activity beyond the implementation of the core curriculum. Even though the law was later vetoed by the President and never came into force, some headteachers, as a preventive matter, subsequently limited the access of NGOs to schools as a result.

Furthermore, some superintendents and headteachers associate the topic of misinformation with politics. Even though the "Fakescape" game runs a fake presidential campaign, with non-existent candidates created for the sake of workshops, some people worry that workshops on misinformation are a way to "smuggle" political content into schools.

Initiative 2: Fact-checking Academy (Akademia Fact-Checkingu)

Monitoring and evaluation practices

Monitoring and evaluation practices of the Academy would benefit from being expanded. Currently, the main way of collecting feedback is surveys distributed after the activities. Generally, both workshops for students and training for teachers are positively rated by the participants, with above 80% approval rates. Students also positively rate the increase in their media literacy knowledge and skills. Evaluations are, however, only able to assess short-term effects as they remain one-off. The Foundation cannot revisit schools or verify if the new skills are actually employed by students in practice. The measurement of media literacy learning outcomes beyond self-assessment surveys is currently considered outside of the Foundation's competences.

Contact

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Initiative 3: Cyberproof (Cyberodporni)

Overview of measure

Cyberproof is one of the flagship initiatives of the Kościuszko Institute. It consists of several related instruments and actions that targets various groups, most notably students and teachers. Recently, the organisation has expanded its efforts to to target citizen at large, with an ongoing project related to how misinformation affects women, a topic that was absent in a misinformation discourse in Poland.

The project has ran since 2021. It builds on the Institute's mission to support civil society, rule of law and cybersecurity in Poland. In particular, the Covid-19 pandemic and related misinformation campaigns was a key trigger for the initiative's launch. The institute believed that access to the verified sources of information and media literacy required to identify credible information are key to strengthening democracy and support for national security.

Implementation

The Cyberproof initiative consists of several related actions on digital citizenship and raising awareness of the problems of misinformation online. Its main tool is a handbook titled "With a shield! How to protect yourself from disinformation"440. The handbook is addressed to high school students and is available for free. A unique feature of this handbook is its composition. The first, general part of the handbook covers key general issues of misinformation including the identification of fake news and examples of disinformation and types of manipulation. The second part consists of chapters devoted to particular platforms: Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok and Wykop.pl. The Institute's experts correctly identified that misinformation practices are different depending on the platform, as seen in the context chapter of this report. It should also be noted that some teachers do not use social media at all, whereas others consume them in a different way than younger generations (e.g. Polish teachers are mostly active on Facebook, whereas students are on TikTok). As a result, they struggle to ground their teaching in their own experiences. To support teachers in bridging this gap, the handbook is complemented with a set of guidelines for teachers, with lesson scenarios441. The Institute has organised several workshops for teachers on the use of the handbook.

Activities of the Kościuszko Institute targeted towards school children and teachers are complemented with awareness raising campaigns on misinformation aimed at the general population. The institute organises a regular national CyberSecurity Conference and publishes podcasts on misinformation and cybersecurity. Several podcasts are available in English.

The initiative was primarily founded by a grant from the US Embassy in Poland.

Initiative 3: Cyberproof (Cyberodporni)

What works

The Institute collects feedback from interviewees and teachers who use the handbook. Chapters devoted to specific platforms and underlining the specific actions required are considered to have the greatest value for participants. Since the Institute is primarily an expert organisation, it has limited access to schools and teachers. This ultimately affects the reach and impact of the initiative.

Monitoring and evaluation practices

With limited access to the schools, the possibilities to monitor and evaluate learning outcomes are very limited. Further cooperation with the Ministry of Education or superintendents of specific schools would be particularly beneficiary. Similarly to other initiatives, Cyberproof would benefit from the existence of publicly available tools to measure actual media literacy learning outcomes.

Contact

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Romania

Initiative 1: The Bulgarian-Romanian Observatory of Digital Media Activities

Overview of measure

The Bulgarian-Romanian Observatory of Digital Media Activities (BROD) is one of the 14 national and regional hubs of the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO), an independent observatory established in 2020 and funded by the European Commission, working to detect and expose online disinformation and organising media literacy activities.

BROD represents a multinational and interdisciplinary centre aimed at detecting, analyzing, and combating disinformation in the two neighbouring countries, Bulgaria and Romania, which share similar characteristics and vulnerabilities when it comes to misinformation. The populations of these countries are among the most susceptible to conspiracy theories and misinformation in Central and Eastern Europe[442].

BROD has laid the foundations for an extended partnership with important stakeholders in the field, operating for a period of 30 months, from December 2022 to May 2025. The actions undertaken are diverse, targeting both the general public and people vulnerable to misinformation such as young people, adults and the elderly, as well as specific professionals including journalists, teachers, and librarians.

Initiative 1: The Bulgarian-Romanian Observatory of Digital Media Activities

Implementation

BROD brings together the transnational community of fact-checkers, experts in media literacy and combating disinformation, academic institutions, researchers and technology and software providers to investigate the mechanisms of disinformation: sources, networks, main vectors of dissemination, methods, potential victims, and the wider effects of disinformation on society.

Under the BROD umbrella, a broad spectrum of endeavours is undertaken, encompassing research, publication of specialized articles, tutorials, and educational resources, alongside media education courses for educators. Promotional campaigns, fact-checking activities, and research into disinformation campaigns are also key facets. Tools for disinformation analysis are developed and implemented, alongside a multilingual public platform offering information on disinformation, media literacy, and fact-checking. Additionally, training programs for journalists and roundtable discussions further augment the comprehensive efforts of BROD.

The BROD umbrella brings together a total of 14 partners that contribute to the implementation of the organisation's activities. A few prominent organisations include: the Big Data for Smart Society Institute (GATE) (Bulgaria), the Center for Independent Journalism (Romania), the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA) (Romania), the Agence France Presse (AFP) and Funky Citizens (Romania).

In addition to the objectives of creating a Romanian-Bulgarian research centre for the digital environment, identifying, analyzing, and exposing disinformation, communicating to the general public, and collaborating with key stakeholders (citizens, journalists, media, political decision-makers, authorities, NGOs, and businesses), the project partners also aim for the sustainability of actions. This involves continuing activities under the umbrella of EDMO, including research and dissemination of results, fact-checking activities, continuous media literacy programs, and sustainable cooperation with national authorities and regulators.

What works

Despite the umbrella organisation accommodating an array of different partners, the collaboration has been deemed successful by the organising parties. This is largely attributed to having clearly stipulated responsibilities assigned to each partner from the onset, based on their areas of expertise, which has helped to leverage each organisation's strengths and contribute to an overall efficient work organisation.

However, it is difficult to assess to what extent BROD activities have had societal impacts. Although a macro-societal impact was pursued, the interviewee's assessment is that the impact remains at a micro level. Research, publications, and activity results do not effectively reach very large segments of the public, remaining within a narrower sphere of those interested in the subject, within academic communities, and among individuals included in the project's target group. According to the interviewee, considerable knowledge and training in the media field are necessary so that people not only verify information to see how accurate it is, but also possess the skills to identify potentially false content from the outset.

Monitoring and evaluation practices

The evaluation of the project/initiative focuses on the performance indicators established at the project level. Each partner involved in the project is responsible for achieving the performance indicators they have assumed. At the time of the case study, there is no centralized situation at the project level regarding the achievement of indicators and the degree of attainment reached.

Examples of indicators found in the BROD project:

> Number of specialized articles published
> Number of participations in conferences/academic events
> Number of media literacy workshops conducted
> Number of training programs carried out
> Number of activity reports produced
> Number of disinformation analysis tools implemented, etc.

Contact

Website: https://brodhub.eu/en/

Initiative 2: Factual.ro by Funky Citizens

Overview of measure

Factual.ro is the first political fact-checking website in Romania, aiming to educate citizens in critical thinking and to put pressure on politicians to use factual data. Additionally, it aims to build a diverse community of experts who consistently fact-check and monitor the activity of key political actors.

Launched in May 2014 with the financial support of the Civic Innovation Fund443 as part of the "Consumer Protection of Policy" project, the initiative is still ongoing. It is implemented by the Funky Citizens Association and relies on the voluntary contributions of the team, as well as contributions from followers.

Factual.ro is aimed at any citizen interested in the proper functioning of things, but particularly those who are not politically represented and are affected by the poor quality of debates in the Romanian public spaces.

Implementation

The activity carried out by Factual.ro involves fact-checking, which entails verifying statements made by politicians across various domains. The Factual team utilises accumulated expertise and adheres to international fact-checking standards444. Factual relies on official reports, relevant sources, and aims to clarify statements in a manner that is understandable to all citizens.

Since July 2022, Factual has been a third-party fact-checker in the fact-checking program conducted by Meta, verifying posts with potentially misleading content on Facebook and Instagram.

In selecting the topics for analysis, an internal team chooses the most important subjects that appear on social media based on well-established fact-checking criteria, and then the verification process begins. The analysis includes content transmitted by Factual.ro followers, addressing topics of interest to the general public.

The fact-checking activity involves sustained effort, with personnel from the internal team (editors, communicators, experts) as well as an external team consisting of volunteer experts with expertise in various fields (justice, economics and business environment, public policies, European funds and international relations, public administration, energy, sociology, statistics, etc.).

The team is based on five operating principles, namely:

1. Non-political affiliation – individuals who are independent, impartial, and honest.

2. Transparency of sources and standards regarding them.

3. Transparency regarding funding and organizational affiliation.

4. The existence of a transparent methodology that is adhered to.

5. The existence of a policy of honest and transparent corrections.

Initiative 2: Factual.ro by Funky Citizens

What works

Followers of Factual.ro have gained trust in the activities carried out and the accuracy of the information provided. This has led to a high level of engagement, with followers actively involved and interested in fact-checking. The Factual.ro team receives verification suggestions even from site followers who are highly engaged in fact-checking activities, suggesting that the service is valued also by those with above average media literacy skills.

At the same time, as a result of its sensitive work, the organization is sometimes attacked and associated with various negative international figures and global conspiracy theories. As a result of the potential backlash associated with the work, the team has decided that articles regarding news verification and debunking should not be signed by the individuals who contributed to them but by the≈Factual.ro editorial team, in order to protect the individuals involved, both online and in real life, from physical aggression.

Monitoring and evaluation practices

There are no established performance indicators for the fact-checking activity. The most relevant aspect is the high number of site followers – over 400,000 people – who access the links and interact with the published content. There is a steady increase in the number of followers, indicating organic growth and achieving the objective of reaching a large audience. There are opinions that the population is becoming more open to ensuring that the information reaching them is accurate and verified.

Contact

Website: https://funky.ong/en/ / https://www.factual.ro/

Initiative 3: Internet Heroes

Overview of measure

The "Internet Heroes" project is implemented by the Adfaber Association, a Romanian non-profit organization.

Internet Heroes primarily aims to improve children's ability to stay safe and informed online. The initiative arose in response to children's rising exposure to online spaces and its associated risks. These risks that children are exposed to include data theft, cyberbullying, phishing, exposure to fake news, and even cases of child pornography. Against this backdrop, the project addresses both children and parents and teachers through specific activities and resources provided, emphasising the importance of involving these three parties in the program.

The project was initiated in 2020, following the allocation of financial support through a grant from Google.org. The project is currently ongoing as a result of the allocation of a new tranche of funds through the regional grant offered by the School with Class Foundation from Poland and Google.org. This has allowed the project's scope to expand to the neighbouring Republic of Moldova.

Initiative 3: Internet Heroes

Implementation

Through the Internet Heroes project, educational materials and pedagogical support are provided, including lesson scenarios, online training, and courses with teachers, along with webinars for parents. The activities carried out through the project include:

> Free training sessions on online safety for teachers
> A curricula programme developed by Google about online safety
> Games through which children can learn about online safety
> Free webinars for parents about family online safety
> Online Safety Marathon – a series of interviews with experts from various fields
> The Heroes of the Internet radio show, created in collaboration with Itsy Bitsy radio
> The national Internet Heroes competition, in which students from grades 0 to VIII create campaigns to promote online safety
> School visits, during which the Adfaber team discusses online safety with students and teachers

The Internet Heroes focuses on the following themes:

6. Be smart online – Share with caution: Digital footprint and responsible communication

7. Be vigilant online – Don't be fooled: Phishing, scams, and credible sources

8. Be strong online – Secure your secrets: Online security and passwords

9. Be kind online – It's cool to be kind: Combating negative online behaviours

10. Be brave online – If in doubt, ask: Questionable content and scenarios

The Internet Heroes project emphasises the importance of media literacy to ensure that children are alert online and do not fall victim to false information circulating in the online environment. The elements of media literacy are found in the Online Safety and Digital Citizenship Curriculum developed within the project.

It is necessary for teachers to be involved in helping students use analytical questions to assess the credibility of a source and to identify information that lacks trustworthiness in the online environment. For this, students need to be capable of applying their own skills to analyse all types of media content, thus being prepared to examine special categories of media, such as news or scientific data.

As a result, a set of specific objectives have been set for students, which include:

> Identifying tools already used to determine if information is credible.
> Evaluating how certain aspects such as expertise and motivation affect credibility.
> Learning 4 questions for evaluating source credibility.
> Understanding that a source considered credible on a certain subject may not necessarily be as credible for other subjects.
> Discovering that checking multiple sources helps establish the credibility of information.
> Identifying clues that tell them whether a news source or information is credible or not.
> Using analytical questions and careful observation to evaluate source credibility.
> Understanding the importance of verifying the credibility of a source before sharing its message.
> Developing the habit of analyzing all news and information, not just information they consider suspicious.

Initiative 3: Internet Heroes

What works

An impressive number of individuals have been involved in Internet Heroes activities. More than 30,000 teachers have participated in training programs, and more than 100,000 students have received online safety lessons. In total, it is estimated that over 1 million students have received information about online safety as a result of interventions supported by the Adfaber Association in collaboration with partners, as well as through the contribution of teachers who delivered classroom lessons and participated in online safety training programs themselves.

Parents represent the group that is the most difficult to reach through the program; they are often not aware of the importance of monitoring their children's online activities and do not dedicate enough time to this aspect or to inform themselves about the dangers posed by the online environment.

There have been challenges in the implementation process in various forms, but the association is adapting on the go and implementing measures that can yield results – webinars, interviews and discussions with influencers to draw their attention, media campaigns dedicated to children and parents, etc., are proposed to attract parents. Despite the challenges, which are often personalized depending on each educational institution, experience has shown that these challenges are precisely the source of improvements in the actions carried out in the project.

In the project, several initiatives have been implemented to boost motivation for participation. One such initiative includes national competitions wherein participants/students receive symbolic prizes for organizing awareness campaigns on online safety. These efforts also play a role in elevating the project's visibility on a national scale.

Additionally, the fruitful collaboration with the local Google team has contributed to the successful implementation of the project. Their involvement in joint campaigns to engage parents and their efforts in motivating teachers' participation have been instrumental.

The success of the project's interventions was ensured by involving partners of significant importance, such as the Ministry of Education in Romania, the Romanian Police, the Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova and Siguranta.ro., although it is appreciated that the involvement of authorities in Romania is more limited compared to those in the Republic of Moldova.

Furthermore, the activities of the Internet Heroes Caravan, which travelled across the country, as well as numerous media appearances to promote the project and its activities, along with the involvement of media partners (various radio channels), contributed to visibility and attracted a large target audience.

Initiative 3: Internet Heroes

Monitoring and evaluation practices (0.25 p)

In the project, there are established objectives to achieve and deliverables assumed by the association through a contract, but the emphasis is on the sustainability of the project, which was not a mandatory requirement. The project presents a series of performance indicators that the association has committed to. Examples of indicators include:

> › Number of teachers
> › Number of parents
> › Number of children
> › Number of meetings held

To assess the effectiveness of the project's measures, Adfaber conducts surveys after the completion of training sessions with teachers, paying particular attention to the number of teachers who disseminate what they have learned to their classes, applying online safety awareness. Furthermore, a study is conducted to assess children's perception of the program and the internet, and the study demonstrates the success of the actions initiated by the project.

The activities of the Internet Heroes Caravan in the field also collect feedback on the effectiveness of the implemented measures, noting significant differences between children who participated in the project and those who did not. It is observed that children who have been exposed to the project, even just by playing the educational game associated with it, know how to react to various online situations. The significant added value of the project lies in the critical thinking skills developed among children.

Contact

Website: https://adfaber.org/eroii-internetului/

Spain

Overview of measure

The project 'BuloBús: Route against disinformation' toured around 19 towns in Spain between April and May 2023 in a minibus. It aimed to help citizens detect fake news and scams circulating on the Internet and social networks and to provide them with tools to fight against misinformation.

Picture of the BuloBús

The project involved an awareness-raising campaign around misinformation combined with educational workshops in schools and education centres run by Maldita[446] – one of the leading fact-checking organisations in Spain. The minibus was parked in central locations of Spanish towns with less than 40,000 inhabitants, covering at least one town in almost all Spanish autonomous communities. Several journalists and trainers from Maldita.es travelled on the minibus, and in each town a range of activities were organised related to the fight against disinformation.

The project focused on disinformation linked to scams (e.g. stealing PIN codes). The main target audience of this initiative was people over 65 years of age living in small localities where they might not come across information about media literacy and young people. This group was considered particularly vulnerable to scams and misinformation being shared with them (e.g. via WhatsApp) because they are not considered a native digital group (i.e. born after the internet was created). This group was also considered more likely to believe information shared by friends and family online.

Initiative 1: The Fakenews Bus – the route against disinformation (El buloBus: la ruta contra la desinformacion)[445]

Implementation

Maldita carried out pilot activities before launching the BuloBús project to understand the logistical requirements to tour around Spain, develop a set of supporting education materials and tools, and train the 10 staff members involved in the project.

After the pilot, an action plan was developed using the criteria of targeting: i) cities of less than 40,000 inhabitants, ii) places where inhabitants over 65 years old make up between 15% to 30% of the population and iii) ensure a good geographical coverage (north/south/east/west). The BuloBús project was financed by the Google News Initiative.

The BuloBús project involved three main activities:

1. The project team would book a public space/a place of passing to park the minibus and set up the stand/information point for citizens. They asked for permission from the city authorities and collaborated with the local police. Staff provides passing citizens with leaflets on misinformation and how to use digital tools more securely. Advice to those that stopped and were interested was also provided.

2. In parallel to the stand/information point, the project team also runs workshops in education centres on disinformation and cybersecurity. The sessions were interactive and involved teachers and students. The content of these educational workshops has been used by the Maldita educational team in previous educational activities.

Around the public place where the stand was located, the project team also carried out a theatre play in the evening. Students and teachers that participated in the workshops were invited to attend alongside everyone that passed by the stand in the morning. The play aimed to disseminate information regarding the dangers of misinformation and its consequences.

These three activities were accompanied by a national media and press campaign to launch the initiative on its first day, as well as some media coverage at community-level to inform people about the BuloBus project and in which public spaces the minibus and stand will be located.

The BuloBus project was also a good opportunity for Maldita to strengthen its community. Via the informative stand, project staff not only provided elderly people with information about how to avoid fake news and manage potential scams, but also encouraged them to use Maldita's fact-checking services to verify the legitimacy of information. Maldita's community is young, and there was an ambition to open it up further to people above 65, which the project was able to do.

Initiative 1: The Fakenews Bus – the route against disinformation (El buloBus: la ruta contra la desinformacion)[445]

What works

A few factors contributed to the success of the BuloBus project. These include:

> The piloting of the initiative was an effective tool to map logistical needs (resources and time) for the project implementation. The project team spent a lot of time working with the administrations including timing to get permits and understanding local police capacity etc. Each local administration is different and have their own way of doing things. Thus, it is important to have set aside time to work with them and have a detailed plan of activities.

> Having a strong team of trainers and tailored resources for elderly and young people. Maldita staff is trained on how to approach people with new information and introduce them to different tool and information available to their needs.

> The face-to-face element of the initiative was quite effective in reaching the elderly population (+65). They appreciate being given new information face to face and having the possibility to ask questions and interact with young and informed people. Finding the right public space to set up the stand and do the theatre play was also critical for the effectiveness of the face-to-face activities.

There were two key learnings from the BuloBus project that should be considered for future iterations and other projects:

> The use of more inclusive language. Concepts like media literacy and rural world have a historical negative connotation in Spain. People think they are being called uneducated/illiterate. Thus, other words such as education consciousness around fake news should be considered so people don't feel alienated.

> Training project staff to deal with complicated situations including interventions by groups that might try to boycott the face-to-face activities. It is important for the team to have rebutting arguments for those that challenge the need for media literacy activities, even if they might not accept the given explanation. Moreover, logistic plans should include contact with local authorities and police to get their support from the start, and also make them aware of any threats received before the bus arrives to their cities.

Monitoring and evaluation practices

The project team monitored the reach of the initiative, quantifying the impact of the activities using their own monitoring tools – including attendance forms at workshops and theatre plays, counting the number of interactions at the stand and database of Maldita's consultation services – as well as from data received by national and regional media channels. The only target set at the start was to reach 20 towns in Spain. An overview of the main impact metrics can be found below:

> 19 towns in 14 Spanish autonomous communities;
> 1900 older people reached via the stand and theatre play;
> 490 secondary school students reached in workshops;
> 130 mentions in national and regional media;
> 36 interviews in high impact media, and;
> 1700 new users of Maldita's consultation service.

Contact

Website: https://bulobus.com/

Initiative 2: Surfear la red (Surfing the net)[447]

Overview of measure

Surfing the Net is an umbrella educational programme with multiple components. It aims to help primary school pupils navigate safely online (Sé Genial en Internet), secondary school pupils to detect and avoid fake news and other types of online misinformation (Eraser), cover critical thinking, media literacy and digital leisure training to schoolteachers and provides families with didactic materials about child protection and safety on the internet and social networks (project Shield).

Surfing the Net is in its fourth year. This project is led by FAD Juventud together with Google and Disney, in collaboration with other stakeholders such the national police, national institute of cybersecurity (INCIBE), Spanish consumer association (OCU) and Spanish agency for data protection (AEPD).

Implementation

The Surfear la red educational programme involves four components:

> The first component is called 'Sé Genial en Internet' which aims to provide a series of resources to teach children age 10 to 12 years old how to use the Internet responsibly. The centrepiece of the component is Interland448, an interactive game to help children learn key lessons about how to use digital tools safely.

> The second component is called 'Eraser' a gamified educational adventure, designed to train secondary school pupils to handle information in digital contexts. Through four modules, following the phases of critical thinking, ERASER shows students the different types of disinformation that exist online, based on real cases. It gives them tools and strategies to detect and deal with them, as well as to avoid generating disinformation when creating their own digital content. FAD Juventud's team is currently updating the content of the Eraser project so it will also include AI aspects.

> Thirdly, there is a teacher capacity-building component around critical thinking. It is a 25 hours free course for teachers around critical thinking, digital and media literacy and digital leisure. It provides teachers with resources and tips on how to teach critical thinking and the responsible use of digital leisure activities. Over 1,000 teachers have been trained, and for the next edition, AI aspects will be part of the capacity-building training with teachers.

> The last component of Surfear la red targets families. This component is called 'SHIELD: cybernautic families', that consist of a digital learning space that offers parents attractive resources for positive and safe digital accompaniment, which reduces the risks of using information and communication technologies. It is divided into five areas of different educational content on protection and safety on the internet and social Networks, with the aim of educating in digital citizenship and safety in a responsible and safe way. Fad Juventud is currently prepare an event together with Disney, Google, Meta and other partners as part of this component to provide parents with more information about minor protection tools and how to use them. This component of Surfear en la red is financed by Disney.

What works

Surfing the Net has been one of the most successful programmes implemented in recent years by Fad Juventud. One of the enablers of this programme is its interactive and comprehensive methodology to train and support educational agents in the importance of digital well-being for youth. The gamified methodology and the processes of innovation and continuous improvement allow the programme activities to be adapted to the needs of educational centres.

Another success factor of the programme is the involvement of teachers and educational centers that request to participate and are involved daily in the comprehensive education of youth. The support received by educational stakeholders related to the content of the programme has been very useful. They have contributed to promote greater knowledge of the programme in the educational community.

A challenge that the programme has faced during is the accelerated and continuous advance of TRICO (Relationship, Information, Communication and Leisure Technologies) in society; which implies a constant need for updating and innovation in the content and resources used.

Initiative 2: Surfear la red (Surfing the net)[447]

Monitoring and evaluation practices

Surfing the Net is an umbrella programme that includes various components with their own evaluation and monitoring system.

The "Sé Genial en Internet" workshops, held in Primary Education classrooms, include a questionnaire that is completed by both the participating students and the teachers who attend the workshop. From the data obtained by it, it is possible to know the degree of satisfaction and adequacy of the content taught and the degree of impact thereof in the classroom, indicated by the corresponding teaching staff.

Eraser, the gamified training on the different types of misinformation, in which secondary education students participate, has a questionnaire that allows to assess students and teachers satisfaction. The project has also another tool to assess possible impacts or changes in knowledge and attitude towards digital reality by participating students.

The teacher training (included with the name Be Critical and the FakesOver game) also have its own assessment system that allows direct and immediate knowledge of their degree of adaptation with respect to the needs and expectations of the target group.

A total of 25,000 adolescents were reached and 1,000 teachers have been trained as part of the Surfing the Net umbrella programme.

Contact
Website: https://www.campusfad.org/surfear-la-red/

Initiative 3: PasaDelBulo, y navega seguro (Don't mind the fake news, and surf safely)

Overview of measure

The Audiovisual Council of Andalusia (CAA) set up the awareness-raising campaign 'PasaDelBulo, y navega seguro' in response to misinformation online around COVID-19 vaccinations and methods on how to not get COVID. From university research activities and conversations with educational stakeholders, CCA deduced that the most vulnerable groups to fake news in Andalusia were older generations (+65 years old) and young people (below 18 years old). As noted by universities in Andalusia – which have several educational programmes for the elderly – people over 65 years old have received digital education. Thus, the use of digital tools and understanding of digital content is quite new to them. They struggle to distinguish the veracity of the digital content they consume, particularly the information shared through WhatsApp by friends and family.

To tackle this issue, CCA launched the awareness-raising campaign 'PasaDelBulo, y navega seguro'. The campaign includes ten clear and concise messages to prevent minors and older people from fake news and misinformation – e.g. how to read and verify information shared on Facebook and WhatsApp.

Initiative 3: PasaDelBulo, y navega seguro (Don't mind the fake news, and surf safely)

Implementation

The campaign 'PasaDelBulo, y navega seguro' was broadcasted on TVE Andalucía, the two RTVA channels (Canal Sur TV and Andalucía TV), 7TV Andalucía, Onda Cádiz, Sevilla FC TV, Betis TV and the television stations belonging to the Association of Local Telecommunications Operators of Andalusia (ACUTEL), as well as on the screens of the Seville metro and the city buses of Cádiz and Málaga.

Before being broadcast, the campaign was launched on websites and social networks to present the decalogue of recommendations drawn up by the Audiovisual Council of Andalusia.

The campaign summarises the ten steps of the CCA decalogue on how to detect fake news and protect minors. These include checking the URL to be sure that it links to the authentic service and that the address includes the letter 's' beginning with 'https' to the analysis of information without haste, encouraging to navigate the internet with respect, to make children aware of how new technologies affect them, to teach them to be tolerant with news that affects specific people and to learn to avoid clickbait.

The campaign was funded by CCA's annual budget (public funds).

What works

Working in collaboration with partners in the development and implementation of the campaign 'PasaDelBulo, y navega seguro' was crucial for its wide reach. In the case of the campaign, the two football clubs in Sevilla were partners, using their internal communication tools (e.g. social media channels with millions of followers) to promote the campaign. At the local level, CCA had an agreement with the network of local buses in Sevilla, Cordoba and Malaga. As part of their internal communications, they broadcasted the 'Pasa del Bulo' campaign on the screens in their metro and bus routes and stops. These collaborations allowed the Council to reach segments of the population that by themselves they would not have been able to reach.

Monitoring and evaluation practices

In the case of the 'PasaDelBulo, y navega seguro', CCA did not have monitoring and evaluation practices in place. However, in recent initiatives such as the workshops 'Elderly with Wifi' they have gathered some metrics on the reach and success of these activities. For example, as part of the 'Elderly with Wifi' workshop, they ran a satisfaction survey for participants to rank the quality of the workshop – the latest ranking was 8.9 out of 10.

Contact

Website: https://consejoaudiovisualdeandalucia.es/alfabetizacion-mediatica/

🇬🇧 United Kingdom

Initiative 1: Newsguard

Overview of measure

NewsGuard announced in February 2023 that thanks to the DCMS/DSIT Media Literacy Programme Fund, it would partner with civil society organizations, grassroots non-profits, ageing-focused charities, and community support groups serving the elderly, to deliver media literacy training for staff members, carers, and the old age community. NewsGuard's main focus is combating disinformation through the use of embedded tools that rate the quality and authenticity of online news. As such, while the programme did engage with the broader media literacy priorities as set by the UK government, its main focus was on raising awareness of disinformation among older audiences, and introducing them to NewsGuard's tool for identifying it while they are online.

This programme was devised in response to NewsGuard's research on older people and media literacy, which filled an existing gap in the media literacy landscape and showed that older people were an important group to reach, but were often left behind. It was focused on addressing the relatively low levels of media literacy training among these audiences, and the over-emphasis on basic digital skills and financial literacy in services that currently exist. It was designed to help organisations already working with older people to address misinformation as part of their service delivery, by providing staff, carers and elderly people with a better understanding of how to navigate online news and recognise misinformation, and how to use the NewsGuard extension in this context.

It offered partner organisations:

› Free access to NewsGuard's browser extension providing Reliability Ratings of news sources for the elderly and their carers

› Training for staff, volunteers, and the elderly on how to use NewsGuard's browser extension to stay protected from misinformation when browsing online

› Tailored media literacy training sessions on identifying and combating misinformation, run by expert journalists

› Educational resources to improve resilience to and awareness of the pervasive issue of misinformation, which disproportionately impacts vulnerable populations such as the elderly

› The programme was community-based and UK-wide, and the government priority was to reach people with English as a second language.

Initiative 1: Newsguard

Implementation

The programme involved working with partner organisations to deliver training for older people and those supporting them (staff, carers), about the dangers of misinformation online. Access to partnerships was helped by the government funding, because it overcame the tendency to perceive NewsGuard as an American organisation, and therefore less relevant to the UK context.

The partners were Age UK, Independent Age, the Good Things Foundation, Digital Communities Wales (CWMPAS), Age Action, Wales Internet Safety Partnership, Leeds Older People's Forum, and CyberSeniors. The partner organisations were all already delivering services to older people and were able to connect NewsGuard with people in their networks who would benefit from the programme.

The training sessions were tailored to the needs of older audiences, so that they were as relevant as possible for the staff and the populations they serve. NewsGuard's own research was used to inform the approach to the training, which focused on raising awareness of the importance of the issue of misinformation, and tackling the challenge that although people agree that misinformation is a problem, they don't think that they are part of that problem. In addition, their research showed that older people are more politically active, confirming the importance of ensuring they are accessing accurate and truthful information online. Training included posing questions that prompted critical thinking – e.g. examining what is available on a site's 'About' page, or considering why it matters who is funding different types of information. Within this model, delivery was tailored to the needs of each organisation and their members; there was no 'one size fits all', and digital literacy skills varied so that some needed a session focused on 'misinformation 101' while others were more advanced and the training could be set at a higher level.

What works

Evaluation was done by conducting surveys after each workshop, confirming what participants' understanding of misinformation was before and after the training. Anecdotal feedback suggested that the training sessions were well-designed, received very positively, gave participants more confidence to go online, and prompted wider discussions within partner organisation staff and users about disinformation and misinformation online.

Delivering the training online was a key success factor. Online delivery meant the programme was very scalable and could reach more people, more cost effectively. The webinars were also recorded and distributed afterwards, which extended reach even further. For one partner, NewsGuard authored a chapter on mis/disinformation for their volunteer handbook. The webinars were also able to be re-used in other projects, thereby extending NewsGuard's ability to deliver support in its other outreach work.

The online mode of delivery also meant that the format was flexible enough to integrate information about generative AI's potential to create and spread misinformation, halfway through the project when it became a bigger issue for participants.

The partnerships were essential success factors because they provided a central point from which older people could be reached. However, each partnership had to be handled separately because access to their communities was carefully managed. This fragmentation made it more difficult to integrate the work being done across partners.

In addition, the limited resources and broad coverage of partner organisations meant that it was sometimes difficult to navigate through to the right contact for delivery, and sometimes the correct contacts were unexpected (e.g. librarians).

Benefits that could be transferred to other countries would include delivering training online so that reach and scalability is maximised; working with partners to reach groups that are difficult to access through stand-alone channels; and if a partnership is successful, having access to other channels through which content and training can be delivered (e.g. the webinars, the handbook).

Initiative 1: Newsguard

Monitoring and evaluation practices

NewsGuard's use of monitoring and evaluation in their media literacy support work has been limited, largely because its work in this sector is often pro-bono.

The main evaluation tool for this intervention was the programme survey, which gave an insight into how successful each delivery was. However, in practice it was challenging to gather feedback: the uptake of the survey (sent out via Google Forms) was limited and partial, suggesting that people were happy to join the session and learn more, but did not want to do more 'homework' following the sessions. In future, conducting evaluation as part of a live session (e.g. first and last 5 min of the session) would be a way around this, to gather responses while people are still engaged.

The short timeframe for the project also meant that it was difficult to adjust the content after receiving the feedback they did receive from each delivery. It was also unclear how the issue of misinformation would continue to be addressed by the partner organisations with their service users; this challenge reflects the general difficulty of tracking the impact of media literacy interventions over time.

The need to tailor delivery also meant that there was a limited ability to compare results across partnerships, limiting the degree to which an overall assessment of the outcomes could be made.

Contact
Website: https://www.newsguardtech.com/industries/media-literacy-older-populations/

Contact person: Veena McCoole, veena.mccoole@newsguardtech.com

Initiative 2: Be Internet Legends

Overview of measure

Be Internet Legends is an educational programme targeted at school children in the UK aged 7-11. It was developed by ParentZone in partnership with Google, and in collaboration with the Oxford Internet Institute, Department for Education and the National Crime Agency's Child Exploitation and Online Protection centre (NCA-CEOP). It is now delivered by ParentZone on behalf of Google. It is associated with Google's global Be Internet Awesome programme, adapted for the UK landscape (it was felt that 'Legends' would be better received than 'Awesome' in the UK), and is used in 80% of UK primary schools. The content is structured around the five-point Internet Legends Code:

- ❯ Be Internet Sharp: Think Before You Share
- ❯ Be Internet Alert: Check It's For Real
- ❯ Be Internet Secure: Protect Your Stuff
- ❯ Be Internet Kind: Respect Each Other
- ❯ Be Internet Brave: When in Doubt, Discuss

Implementation

Be Internet Legends is delivered through assemblies in schools and an accompanying curriculum provided to teachers. Assemblies might be in person or virtual, in which case a thousand schools might attend. Virtual assemblies are streamed on YouTube, and dates for are available on the ParentZone website, and families can also watch. There is also information provided for parents.

The resources for teachers include 12 lesson plans for ages 7-9 and 9-11, and five themed activity packs based around the five pillars of the Internet Legends Code, as well as a digital wellbeing module. In addition, there are editable resources for use with children with special educational needs.

There is also an online game called Interland which aims to teach children key lessons around online safety, with four games based on four of the pillars. The curriculum was updated by ParentZone in 2022.

ParentZone has weekly meetings with Google to discuss the programme's progress. Keeping the curriculum up-to-date in the changing media landscape is a challenge, and an AI module is in development.

Initiative 2: Be Internet Legends

What works

Be Internet Legends was evaluated by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) for a report published in 2020. The evaluation found that 83% of the children who completed the Be Internet Legends programme said that they would behave differently online as a result of having learned how to be more positive through the lessons.

The evaluation found increases in average confidence, including:

> - The largest increase in average confidence (92%) was observed in children in years 5–6 on how to build a positive digital footprint online
> - An increase in average confidence of 60% was found with children in years 5–6 in their ability to identify phishing scams

And increases in individual confidence:

> - 88% of children in years 3–4 reported being confident to speak to an adult about things they encounter online after the programme, compared with 78%beforehand.
> - 71% of children in years 5–6 reported being confident identifying phishing, compared with 25% beforehand.
> - There were also statistically significant increases in tested knowledge following the programme, including:
> - 81% children in years 3–4 could name the key elements of a strong password after the programme, compared with 47% beforehand.
> - 44% children in years 5–6 were able to identify scammers after the programme, compared with 25% beforehand.

According to the evaluation report, survey results and interviews with teachers showed that the lessons model had a greater impact on children than the assemblies, which were less conducive to effective teaching and learning. The lessons offered the chance for more engagement and in-depth interaction than assemblies, which is particularly important for younger children.

The children who took lessons also reported greater enjoyment and a greater likelihood to use the internet differently than children who participated in assemblies. The fact that assemblies can be conducted virtually means that they are scalable, however.

Another evaluation was carried out in 2021 by Ipsos Mori. This also found positive results: for example, that the children who had participated in the BIL programme were twice as likely to show an improved understanding of internet safety compared to the control group (43 vs 21%), and that 49% of participating children in years 5 and 6 showed an improved understanding.

Understanding how to spot at least one clue that something may be suspicious, misleading or a scam online increased from 20% to 70% of children who completed the BIL programme, and 72% of trained pupils understood how to spot phishing online after the training compared to 20% beforehand. Two weeks after the training, 71% of children reported having been kinder in the way they say things online.

Initiative 2: Be Internet Legends

Monitoring and evaluation practices

The earlier evaluation by ISD took place in four primary schools across the UK, intended as a representative sample of the schools that participate in the programme. All Key Stage 2 children took pre and post-intervention surveys, a selection of children participated in a focus group, and semi-structured interviews took place with two teachers.

The surveys consisted primarily of self-assessed confidence measures, which is a limitation, particularly with children of this age, but there were some questions which tested knowledge also.

The 2021 research was commissioned by Google and run by Ipsos Mori, which surveyed 1,638 primary school pupils in years 3-6 at 16 schools in the UK where Google has carried out Be Internet Legends training. Selected pupils who consented to take part completed a paper 'pre' questionnaire to understand their existing knowledge, prior to receiving BIL online safety training. Some pupils received the training during the period of the research study (trained group), whilst others did not receive the training during this period (control group).

All pupils were asked to fill out a second 'post' questionnaire 2-3 weeks after the training period. Differences between children's understanding before and after the training were used to measure the impact of the training on understanding of online safety.

Contact
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Initiative 3: Be Internet Citizens

Overview of measure

Be Internet Citizens is an educational programme targeted at children aged 13+, intended to address some of the gaps in digital citizenship education and increase media literacy and critical thinking skills.

Launched in 2017, BIC's curriculum was developed by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) in partnership with UK Youth and Livity, and informed by YouTube's work with an advisory council. It is currently delivered by ParentZone via schools and youth centres across the UK and is accredited by the PSHE Association. Young people and young content creators were involved in its development.

The concept is an interactive workshop model that creates a third space for young people to explore issues connected to the information ecosystem they are part of, such as understanding mis- and disinformation, understanding filter bubbles, understanding media bias and unconscious bias and understanding how content creators want the audience to respond to that content.

The programme consists of a day-long workshop for participants, with a follow-up curriculum provided to teachers. There are two models for delivery, one in individual schools, one gathering a selection of schools in a local area. Additionally, some teacher training is provided.

Initiative 3: Be Internet Citizens

Implementation

ParentZone identifies areas with a specific need for a media literacy intervention and approaches schools.

Whether in an individual school or in a collection of schools, a BIC workshop involves up to 150 children. The day starts with an assembly session for the whole cohort, and they are then divided into groups of 20-30, with two facilitators per group. Throughout the day they learn about misinformation, filter bubbles, bias, online hate and abuse, and how to respond to all of these safely, and create their own content. A key part of the programme is coming back together at the end of the day to discuss how to put the skills they have learnt to good use.

There is an additional curriculum provided for teachers to use in the classroom: the BIC website also provides a PSHE Association-accredited Unit of Work for secondary school teachers and a Community Toolkit for educators outside of the formal education space, available to download.

The programme is fully funded by YouTube, via a yearly funding cycle that dictates how big the programme is. In the last year, ParentZone delivered four events that included multiple schools, and six in-school interventions. ParentZone has weekly meetings with YouTube/Google contacts.

What works

BIC was evaluated by ISD for a report published in 2020 (more detail below on the process.)
The evaluation showed positive results in terms of self-reported feedback from students on the programme, such as:

> 92% who participated in the programme felt they had gained new knowledge,

> 86% felt they had acquired new skills,

> 71% felt they would behave differently online as a result of being taught by trained teachers.

> There were also statistically significant increases in confidence, such as:

> 88% were confident they could identify fake news after being taught the programme, compared with 68% beforehand.

> 71% were confident that they understood filter bubbles, compared with 14% beforehand.

It also showed increases in tested knowledge among participants, including:

> 81% were able to correctly define hate speech three months following the programme, compared with 65% beforehand.

> 71% were able to identify fake news three months after the programme, compared with 42% beforehand.

Schools are reportedly very willing to participate and enthusiastic about results, and request repeat events.

In terms of reaching target groups, the value of close cooperation with the YouTube/Google team was highlighted, as they can provide access to a larger marketing team and help with participant recruitment.

Monitoring and evaluation practices

The evaluation of the workshops carried out by ISD drew on quantitative and qualitative measurement methods. Participant students and control group students were surveyed pre- and post- delivery, at three months (mid-term) and six-months (long-term) with questions designed to measure understanding of good digital citizenship through a series of confidence-based Likert scale measures.

Evaluators also carried out four focus groups with 32 participating students who gave detailed insights into their experiences of the school workshops, and conducted interviews with three teachers to gain an understanding of the school within which the workshops took place and the subsequent impact of the workshops. Pre- and post-surveys are completed.

Contact

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Initiative 4: Experience AI

Overview of measure

Experience AI is an educational programme that offers resources on artificial intelligence and machine learning for UK teachers and their students aged 11-14, developed in collaboration by the Raspberry Pi Foundation and Google DeepMind.

The programme includes six core lessons on AI and machine learning, with two additional ones on large language models and ecosystems and AI. The free lessons include lesson plans, presentations, simulations, worksheets and hands-on projects.

Additionally, a free four-week online course for teachers on machine learning and AI is also provided, aiming to help them increase their knowledge and confidence. The Experience AI Challenge encourages young people to make their own projects using AI and machine learning, which they can submit to receive feedback.

Implementation

Google DeepMind held consultations with various stakeholders to understand where it could provide unique value in helping young people understand AI, using its research. Through this process it identified AI literacy as a focus and the Raspberry Pi Foundation as a partner. The scoping of what to include and what to address was a research-driven exercise carried out with the Raspberry Pi Foundation, who conducted an analysis of over 500 existing materials on AI literacy to develop something they call the SEAME framework, looking at what young people and teachers need to know about AI from a research and pedagogy point of view, at what was already out there that's covered well, and what they could do differently to develop some high quality materials. This provided the scaffolding for learning that is used for Experience AI.

The project was set up to build on each organisation's expertise, with Google DeepMind developing a working group of researchers and engineers to help bring cutting edge knowledge and expertise to the development of materials, given that Raspberry Pi's expertise is in computer science rather than AI. The Raspberry Pi Foundation led on the analysis of the landscape, and designing the pedagogical principles that underpinned the programme, and producing the materials.

In terms of engagement with its target audience in its design, the project works with a teacher advisory panel and carried out piloting with schools, which allowed teachers and young people to provide feedback.

AI is a fast-developing space, but the focus of the resources is on teaching the fundamental concepts of machine learning along with an awareness of the social and ethical implications – rather than teaching people how to use AI as a tool – so much remains relevant even as the tools change. The examples used might have to be updated regularly, but the fundamental concepts won't.

Initiative 4: Experience AI

What works

Given the reach, the feedback and positive interest in the programme, interviewees described the Experience AI programme as cost-effective. The collaboration between the two organisations – one with extensive industry knowledge of AI and the other with extensive experience in teaching and working with young people – has been crucial to the project's success. The Raspberry Pi Foundation had existing reach into schools and had worked with young people from under-represented groups, which brings credibility among teachers to a programme that they are involved with.

The resources were designed to be very accessible for all teachers regardless of discipline, as they are accompanied by a high degree of support in terms of very clear worksheets and lesson plans, videos, and access to the online training course. However, monitoring has shown that this isn't necessarily enough to build teachers' confidence in a brand new area and the Experience AI team found that it was mainly Computer Science teachers using them. In response to this, the team developed an activity on AI for biology that focused on conservation, and one on LLMs to be taught for PSHE.

Because teachers seem to need more support than originally anticipated, Experience AI is now piloting a new train-the-trainer model for educators in five countries outside the UK. This is a more expensive model but the team believe it is critical to empowering teachers, and will compare the impact of that model versus the current one in terms of how empowered teachers feel.

Monitoring and evaluation practices

Google DeepMind partnered with an independent research centre to look initially look at the effectiveness of Experience AI along with its educational programmes in 2022.

In terms of reach, the Raspberry Pi Foundation captures key metrics around the reach and the demographics of users, along with quick feedback on what teachers are saying about it. Because it is a resource-based programme, the best way of capturing data is asking teachers upfront where they are based, a bit about the school or institution that they teach at, and the estimated number of young people that they will be teaching. They also ask about teacher confidence in teaching the materials and how well-equipped they feel to talk to their students about AI.

Measurements look at total number of website users, total number of downloads, number of countries, number of worldwide educational institutions accessing the resources, number of UK institutions accessing the resources, estimated number of students worldwide and in the UK accessing the resources, For the UK they also try to estimate the percentage of students reached who are non-male, who are from ethnic minority groups and from the most deprived areas in the UK. They also measure the number of teachers participating in the online course.

Data shows that the programme has reached nearly 400,000 young people, with downloads from over 100 countries.

Experience AI has also asked the Raspberry Pi Computing Education Research Centre at the University of Cambridge (a separate entity from the Raspberry Pi Foundation) to conduct an evaluation to look more deeply at the programme in a couple of key areas:

> How Experience AI changes interest in AI among young people
> How it changes their perceptions of the relevance of AI and of AI careers

Contact

Website: https://experience-ai.org/en/

Contact person: Obum Ekeke, Aimee Welch

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