



## OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media

# Freedom MEDIA LITERACY

## Roundtable

### Outcome Report

The RFoM's Media Freedom Literacy Roundtable, held on 6 December 2022 in Vienna, explored the intrinsic connection between media freedom and media literacy, using a cross-sectoral, human rights-based approach.

With varying definitions of media literacy as a composite and evolving concept, this Roundtable focused on media freedom literacy, i.e. the knowledge and skills that enhance the ability to understand and value the democratic functions of the media and other information providers, online and offline, and the importance of information pluralism. This includes critical evaluation and ethical production of information and media content.

The event brought together about 80 participants who shared experiences from across the OSCE region, including representatives of governments, media regulators, civil society, academia and journalistic community.

The Roundtable sought to create synergies among key international media literacy actors, identify existing gaps and showcase successful fact-checking and other relevant platforms and methods, as well as policy making initiatives and best practices. The discussions focused on how to develop meaningful responses to information disorders and to help people critically access and use information as well as participate in democratic debates. The event also examined the role of public service broadcasters in advancing media literacy, by delivering quality content to various segments in society, including marginalized voices.

The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Teresa Ribeiro opened the Roundtable by noting the importance of media literacy as an essential cognitive, technical and social skill in today's increasingly saturated and invasive information ecosystem. She called upon state authorities to promote media and digital literacy, including through concerted efforts with media outlets and civil society, to ensure a cross-dimensional and multi-stakeholder

approach. Next, the Representative emphasized that state authorities should adopt relevant action plans and programmes with a view to enabling individuals to access, understand, critically analyse, use and create content and provide adequate resources for these purposes.

The Representative also highlighted transparency of media ownership and media financing as important areas of reform, while education and capacity building were mentioned as the main cornerstones of media literacy. This requires media education complemented with online assessment strategies, including effective fact-checking techniques, while adding that media could play an important role in promoting media literacy through self-regulatory initiatives, strategies and activities. The Representative concluded that, among the varied media literacy projects and initiatives across the OSCE region, it has become increasingly important to create mechanisms and platforms for strong co-operation between all stakeholders.

### **Session I: Media and digital information literacy as an antidote to information disorders**

Amid the growing threat posed by information disorders, particularly online, panellists highlighted the importance of media freedom literacy and fact-checking/information verification to tackle various types of disinformation. Mikko Salo, founder of Faktabaari NGO, discussed fact-checking in Finland and the tools provided to young people to help them identify and tackle disinformation. These efforts involve digital information literacy (DIL) skills to build resilience and to empower curiosity driven participation in digital democracy. Mr. Salo also presented the DIL-oriented work with the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) NORDIS programme and partners, including Faktabaari's DIL Guide published in 2022.

Martina Chapman, a national co-ordinator for media literacy in Ireland, presented an overview of how media literacy is promoted in her country, including through the Broadcasting Act. Ms. Chapman noted that a sustainable, long-term vision of media literacy in a field that develops and evolves rapidly in response to changes in society, social norms and technology, remains a key challenge. She also highlighted the BE SMART campaign, launched in 2019, encouraging people to "stop, think and check", promoting critical thinking across all media.

Maria Donde, Interim Chairperson of the European Platform of Regulatory Authorities (EPRA) and Chairperson of EMIL (EPRA's MIL taskforce formalized as EMIL), offered a regulatory angle to media freedom literacy. She focused on the importance of co-ordinating resources and promoting networking as effective ways of reaching various stakeholders and ensuring cross-border collaboration.

Alton Grizzle, Programme Specialist at UNESCO, referred to the Global Media and Information Literacy Week 2022 Feature Conference and Youth Forum Agenda, held in October 2022, where the Abuja Declaration on Global Financing for MIL: An Imperative to Fight against Disinformation and Build Trust

has been adopted. Mr. Grizzle also examined the ways in which the Universal Declaration of Human Rights could be referenced to preserve and promote media and information literacy. He stressed the importance for the media to integrate information literacy into their editorial policies and programmes, while emphasizing that media and information literacy must be a crucial component of media business models and sustainable development models.

Radka Betcheva, the Head of Member Relations Central and Eastern Europe of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) presented an overview of media literacy programmes and the role of public service media in the OSCE countries Austria, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, France, Italy, Latvia and the Netherlands. She discussed the different models adopted in these countries, highlighting in particular their media literacy strategies and the role of public service media in promoting media literacy.

Minna Aslama Horowitz, a senior researcher at the University of Helsinki, explained how media and digital information literacy has been promoted in the Nordic countries. She focused particularly on the fact that although young people are the most avid users of digital platforms and digital natives that does not mean they are automatically DIL-skilled. She also highlighted the need to move from media information literacy to digital information literacy, as the latter enables greater accountability and ensures a safer digital environment.

The participants agreed that there are diverse tools to promote media literacy, including human rights declarations, regulation and policies. They also underlined the importance of collaboration between educators, fact-checkers, literacy experts, technologists and regulators. The recommendations below highlight these multi-dimensional aspects of promoting media literacy.

### **Panel I: Conclusions and recommendations**

- Promote self-regulation for media and journalists (including fact-checking);
- Invest in networks to support a systematic multi-stakeholder approach. Investment in MIL networks translates into investment in MIL itself. Media regulatory authorities need to play an active role in facilitating this process;
- Encourage the role of news media in fostering trust to tackle disinformation and bolster media and information literacy;
- Promote a holistic understanding of media freedom and digital media ecosystem through peer-to-peer literacy efforts and with the active engagement of academia;
- Promote continuous learning by emphasizing the “logic” (and harms) of information disorders and surveillance capitalism;
- Involve trusted, quality legacy media and involve young people who seek trusted alternatives that “speak for them”;
- Stress the idea of communication rights and digital citizenship: freedom of the media/freedom of expression is a fundamental right and pillar of democracy;

- Empower and strengthen international partnerships on media and information literacy;
- Ensure that Public Service Broadcasters provide multi-pronged, inter-sectoral and cross-generational approaches by adopting national media literacy programs. A best practice example is Finland's PSB Yle, which is proactive in media education by providing quality digital and audiovisual content for students and educators, aligned with the national strategy.

## **Session II: Mapping media and digital literacy initiatives across the OSCE region**

Maja Cappello, Head of the Department for Legal Information at the European Audiovisual Observatory, presented a media literacy mapping initiative conducted among the EU Member States and the UK, including issues related to the new challenges that come with the tackling of disinformation. The survey identified trends at the national and European levels, as well as new projects and audio-visual content and non-curricular education. Among the survey's conclusions, a strong and constant dialogue with stakeholders was identified as being crucial to encourage the adoption of common indicators on the trustworthiness of content, which would in turn increase the efficiency of media literacy initiatives. Ms. Cappello also noted that the role of institutions is important in building a climate of trust, by having more independent and accountable media regulators involved in monitoring the media landscape.

Marin Lessenski, Programme Director at the Open Society Institute/Sofia, provided an overview of the Media Literacy Index 2022 that assesses the resilience potential of several European countries to the impact of "fake news" and the so-called post-truth phenomenon. He noted that the risk perception often underestimates the actual risk of encountering misinformation, and highlighted low levels of concern about misinformation in some regions, such as parts of Central Asia and Eastern Europe, while the OSI research shows that people are more exposed to disinformation in countries where media freedom is hampered. He argued that education needs to be prioritized over regulation. While education is "the long road", regulation on the other hand involves difficult choices. A dilemma is that disinformation is eroding democracy, but regulations can stifle freedom of expression. Mr. Lessenski identified three key sectors with roles and responsibilities, namely traditional media, online social networks and institutions.

Vanja Ibrahimbegovic-Tihak, a media and digital literacy expert in Bosnia and Herzegovina, examined the media strategies developed in the Western Balkans. She highlighted the lack of sustainable funding, which was identified as a major challenge in the region. Current initiatives focus on integrated media literacy into formal and informal education systems. Alongside this, the use of training materials and workshops, as well as advocacy and fact-checking efforts contribute towards enhancing media literacy. However, there is a lack of systematic integration in formal education processes.

Shushan Doydoyan, President of the Freedom of Information Centre NGO in Armenia, examined the state of media literacy in the South Caucasus, stressing that comprehensive policies and strategies aimed at developing media literacy are lacking in the region. As a result, she added, media and information literacy is often shouldered by civil society and experts in the sector spearheading an increase in non-formal media literacy initiatives. She also highlighted the need to advance media ownership transparency as it helps citizens make an informed and critical evaluation of the information and ideas delivered by the media.

Diana Okremova, Director of the Legal Media Centre in Kazakhstan, presented an overview of media information literacy in Central Asia, noting the absence of strategies in this regard. She highlighted that governments often lack awareness and the skills in this field, while the lack of access to official information forces journalists to turn to alternative, sometimes unreliable, sources. Civil society was mentioned as a major driver of media literacy efforts however there are virtually no intersectoral partnerships for sustainable results.

## **Panel 2: Conclusions and Recommendations**

- People are more vulnerable to the negative effects of disinformation in countries where freedom of the media is hampered. The protection and promotion of media freedom and pluralism, as well as media freedom education are key prerequisites for tackling information disorders effectively.
- The role of institutions like media regulators appears crucial in building a climate of trust. Having independent and accountable media regulators involved in the monitoring of the media landscape could help better understand the “trustworthiness circle” and substantially help users to identify sources that can be trusted, while disregarding those that disseminate disinformation;
- The user perspective is essential in countering disinformation. Providing users of online platforms with the tools to defend themselves against harmful disinformation seems one of the possible winning strategies available that empower users to think critically;
- There is a need to build an inclusive framework and consultative media literacy process between state authorities, civil society, media, academia and private sector;
- Many countries in the OSCE region need to develop a comprehensive media literacy policy/strategy and realistic action plan using an approach with measurable and smart indicators;
- Advance media ownership transparency and the consequent enforcement of regulations in this regard;
- Promote self-regulation and the implementation of co-regulatory mechanisms as a strong basis for media literacy promotion;
- Provide inclusive training for groups excluded from general education which are particularly vulnerable to current challenges;
- Promote independent fact-checking initiatives. Facilitate the creation of an independent regional network of fact-checkers to establish common working methods;

- Initiate research aimed at exploring new types of literacy and soft skills, creating, clarifying and unifying terminology in this area;
- Popularize media information literacy and conduct outreach and awareness activities in the OSCE regions;
- Introduce comprehensive training for public officials, with a focus on decision makers, regarding media literacy and free speech;
- Promote the creation of quality journalistic content that shapes media-literate citizenry, including in national languages;
- Promote public awareness on the algorithms used in social media to moderate and curate, prioritize and recommend content.