



Media and Information Literacy in Albania, Croatia and Serbia

Research on the needs and existing practices

CoachMIL
Scale up MediaCoach



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Introduction

Media and Information Literacy (MIL) has emerged as a critical skillset, especially nowadays. The last three years, 2020 – 2023, have been filled with different global developments, amongst others, the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical tensions like the war in Ukraine, and the advancement of open Artificial Intelligence, which created a perfect environment for the proliferation of false information and conspiracy theories around the world. Altogether, during this period, donors have increased their interest in supporting MIL as the spread of misinformation, fake news, and propaganda has become concerning.

Albania, Croatia, and Serbia have not been immune to these developments. The European Index of Media Literacy for 2023¹, reveals a concerning trend. Out of 41 countries, Albanian ranks 38th, Serbia 31st and Croatia 25th. Furthermore, they have concerning levels of media freedom, with Albania being ranked the lowest at 45th, Serbia 41st and Croatia 31st out of 47 countries². All these three countries, despite the small differences between them, have a low potential to deal with the effects of so called information disorder, mainly due to poor performance in media freedoms and education.

¹ *[MLI-report-in-English-22.06.pdf \(osis.bg\)](#)

² Ibid.

A short overview of the research

With the intent of exploring the country-specific context of MIL, the Albania Media Institute (Albania), Fade In (Croatia) and Media Diversity Institute Western Balkans (Serbia) in the framework of the Project Scale Up Media Coach aimed at increasing MIL competencies in these countries, conducted research in each respective country.

The goal of the research was to provide an overview of the MIL situation in Albania, Croatia, and Serbia for the period 2020 – 2023.

More specifically, the objectives of the research were:

- To analyse the current state of MIL in Albania, Croatia and Serbia for the period 2020 – 2023 by reviewing key strategic/policy documents and reports;
- To identify the key donors and actors that are working in the MIL field in Albania, Croatia and Serbia;
- To identify best practices and needs for future action in the field of MIL in Albania, Croatia and Serbia.

The research was conducted during May – July 2023. All the researchers used the same methodology which was designed for the purposes of the research. The methodology combined qualitative and quantitative research approaches. The instruments designed to gather data included a questionnaire for online dissemination and semi-structured interviews.

Albania

- 10 documents reviewed
- 40 questionnaires completed
- 6 interviews conducted

Croatia

- 4 documents examined
- 2 questionnaires completed
- 1 interviews conducted

Serbia

- 10 documents examined
- 30 questionnaires completed
- 13 interviews conducted

Key findings in a nutshell

- **All three countries lack national strategies and policies that prioritise MIL in early, pre-university and university education.**

In Albania, the government and public institutions have not drafted or approved any policy or strategic document that addresses MIL. Additionally, the existing strategic documents focus on digital skills and the digitalisation of services, overlooking the media and information literacy aspects. There are some efforts to introduce MIL in pre-university and university levels, mostly coming from civil society actors in cooperation with institutions, however no official commitment or financial support is given from the government.

Croatia, on the other hand, lacks an official media literacy policy and dedicated institutions. In 2021, the Croatian government published the National Development Strategy³, which contains a paragraph titled *Encouraging the development of culture and media*. It specifically mentions investing in the development of media literacy, education and acquiring the skills for the digital environment, quality journalism and community media (Hrvatski Sabor, 2021). However, this act has not yet been published.

In Serbia, results show some strategic documents that tackle MIL in education do exist - the "Strategy for the Development of the Public Information System 2020-2025", Media Strategy 2020-2025⁴ and Education Development Strategy until 2030⁵, however their implementation remains questionable.

- **International donors and CSOs play the most active role in promoting MIL.**

International donors are the main financial supporters of MIL initiatives in Albania, Croatia, and Serbia. The government support is inexistent in Albania, and it remains relatively low in Croatia and Serbia. The main donors in all three countries are summarised in the table below:

Main donors supporting MIL during 2020 – 2023		
Albania	Croatia	Serbia
USA Embassy in Tirana	European Union	European Union
UNESCO	Council of Europe	USA Embassy in Belgrade
EU/EACEA	Ministry of Science and Education	Council of Europe

³ The full National Development Strategy is available here: [Nacionalna razvojna strategija Republike Hrvatske do 2030. godine \(nn.hr\)](#), accessed 21.6.2023.

⁴ [Media strategy](#), accessed on June 3rd, 2023.

⁵ [Education development strategy until 2030](#), accessed on June 3rd, 2023.

• The nature of MIL actions and initiatives in all three countries

MIL actions/initiatives during 2020 – 2023		
Albania	Croatia	Serbia
Trainings (57.5%)	Training (25%)	Trainings (62.5%),
Research/studies (35%),	Research (15%)	Research (16.7%)
Development and publication of resources (20%),	Networking (18%)	Advocacy/representation (12.5%)
Community engagement (20%)	Awareness rising campaign (15%)	Development and publication of resources (8.3%)
Awareness rising campaign (15%)	Community engagement (12%)	Awareness rising campaign (4.2%)
Networking (10%)	Resources (8%)	Fundraising (4.2%)
TV programs (7.5%)	Fundraising (7%)	Community engagement (4.2%)
Advocacy (5%).		

• Categories of MIL covered by existing actions

Categories of MIL actions/initiatives during 2020 – 2023		
Albania	Croatia	Serbia
Media literacy (82.5%)	Media Literacy (91.6)	Media Literacy (72%)
Information Literacy (57.5%)	Digital Literacy (37.5%)	Digital Literacy (14%)
Digital Literacy (32.5%)	ICT Literacy/Internet Safety (37.5%)	News literacy (7%)
News Literacy (22.5%)	News Literacy (25%)	Information literacy (7%)
Cultural Literacy (15%)	Cultural Literacy (12.5%)	
Basic Literacies (15%)	Film Literacy(4.16%)	
Libraries literacy (7.5%)		

• MIL priorities for future action

Categories of MIL actions/initiatives during 2020 – 2023		
Albania	Croatia	Serbia
Information literacy (55%)	Media Literacy (23.29%)	Media Literacy (21.3%)
Digital literacy (55%)	Digital Literacy (13.17%)	Digital literacy (17.24%)
Media literacy (52.5%)	News Literacy (9.11%)	ICT Literacy (12.17%)
Cultural literacy (30%)	General Literacies (9.11%)	News Literacy (7.10%)
News literacy (30%)	Information Literacy (8.1%)	Information Literacy (6.8%)
Basic Literacies (25%)	ICT/Internet security (7.9%)	Cultural Literacy (4.6%)
Libraries literacy (23%)	Cultural Literacy (5.6%)	Basic/general literacy (3.4%)
Climate Literacy (2.5%)	Library literacy (3.4%)	Library literacy (1.1%)
	Film Literacy (2.3%)	

• Main MIL beneficiaries

Main beneficiaries of MIL initiatives 2020 – 2023		
Albania	Croatia	Serbia
Students (92.5%)	Children and young people (41.6%)	Youths (36.3%)
Youths NEET (50%)	Organisations/institutions (41.6%)	Teachers (22.7%)
Teachers/pedagogues (35%)	Teachers (33.3%)	Journalists (18.4%)
Pupils (30%)	Students (16.6%)	Students (13.6%)
CSOs/Institutions (27.5%)	Parents (12.5%)	Adults (4.5%)
Journalists (22.5%)	Adults (12.5%)	CSOs/Institutions (4.5%)
Other adults/professionals (17.5%)	Media (12.5%)	
	General public (12.5%)	

• Key MIL competencies developed

Key MIL competencies developed 2020 – 2023		
Albania	Croatia	Serbia
Critical thinking (87.5%),	Critical thinking (54,16%)	Critical thinking skills (66.7%)
Media usage (52.5%),	Creative skills (8,3%)	Creative skills (4.2%),
Creative Skills (32.5%),	Correct use of media (8,3%)	Intercultural dialogue (4.2%),
ICD/Counteracting hate speech (30%)		Use of media (4.2%)
Participation and civic engagement (30%)		Participation and engagement (4.2%)
Information evaluation (10%)		

• Key joint recommendations

Make MIL a national priority. It is essential for the countries to develop a comprehensive National Media and Information Literacy Strategy. These strategies should be formulated in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, including public institutions, formal education institutions, and civil society organisations. It should outline clear goals, objectives, and action plans to address MIL in early, pre-university, and university-level formal education, as well as for the general public.

Incorporate MIL in Formal Education Curricula: To improve MIL levels and ensure its sustainability, the governments should make the inclusion of MIL in formal education curricula a top priority. Media and Information Literacy should be explicitly integrated into subjects or taught as a standalone module. By doing so, students can develop critical thinking, analytical and digital skills necessary to responsibly navigate the ever-evolving media landscape.

Empower Educators / Teachers / Pedagogues: Equipping educators with the necessary training and resources to teach MIL effectively is essential. Professional development programs for teachers should be developed to ensure they can effectively deliver MIL content and integrate it into their teaching practices.

Promote Public Awareness and Engagement: Raising public awareness about the importance of MIL is essential. Engaging citizens through media campaigns, workshops, and community events can foster a culture of media literacy and encourage active participation in MIL initiatives.

Evaluate and assess: regularly assess the effectiveness of media literacy programs to identify areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments (this includes for example self-assessment tests on media literacy that will be regularly conducted, especially before and after a training or education session).





Media and information literacy in Albania

Research on the needs and existing practices

Executive summary

This executive summary highlights the key findings from the study on Media and Information Literacy (MIL) initiatives in Albania for the period 2020 - 2023. The report provides data on MIL initiatives during this period, the support and cooperation for MIL, challenges and needs assessment for future action.

The majority of participants in the study were from formal education institutions (62%), followed by CSOs, media organisations, public institutions, and others. Of the 11 identified categories of actors contributing to MIL, some key sectors like online education platforms, audiovisual industry, ICT, MIL networks, and the researcher's community are not represented in the report.

Most MIL initiatives operated at the national level (62.5%), with a considerable percentage operating at regional (WB6) and international levels (22.5%), and a smaller portion at local and district levels (15%). Given the significant presence of formal education institutions at the national level, it underscores their vital role in widespread and sustainable MIL initiatives. CSOs, on the other hand, were more active in regional and international contexts.

Almost all respondents (95%) undertook at least one MIL initiative during 2020-2023, with the most dominant activities being trainings (57.5%) and research/studies (35%). However, there is room for improvement in areas like design and dissemination of resources, community engagement, advocacy, and TV programs, which are essential for fostering active, well-informed citizenship.

The study highlights the significance of media literacy, information literacy, and news literacy as the major aspects addressed by MIL initiatives. While this focus is crucial for navigating a polarised media environment in Albania, the findings emphasise the need to broaden efforts to include digital literacy, cybersecurity, and AI literacy, which are crucial in the rapidly evolving technological landscape.

Challenges faced by stakeholders in this field include the lack of a strategic approach for MIL in formal education and the limited recognition of the term. Efforts should be made to target broader audiences beyond students and include parents and the elderly in MIL initiatives. Funding constraints, complexity of the field, and clashes of interest between media outlets and MIL stakeholders pose additional challenges.

The priorities for future MIL actions include addressing information literacy, digital literacy, ICT and cybersecurity, media literacy, cultural literacy, news literacy, and basic literacies. Although progress has been made, more focus is needed on incorporating MIL into formal education curricula to empower students with critical-thinking skills. This report recommends developing a National MIL Strategy, promoting AI literacy, and empowering educators to effectively deliver MIL content.

Literature review

The last three years, 2020 – 2023, have been filled with different global developments, amongst others, the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical tensions like the war in Ukraine, and the advancement of open Artificial Intelligence, which created a perfect environment for the proliferation of false information¹ and conspiracy theories. During times of uncertainty and crisis, people often seek answers and explanations for the events unfolding around them. Unfortunately, this has led to an increase in the spread of misinformation, as individuals and groups take advantage of the situation to push their agendas or exploit public fear and confusion.

The lack of media and information literacy skills among the general public in Albania exacerbates the problem. Media and information literacy is the ability to critically analyse and evaluate information sources, distinguish between credible and unreliable information, and understand the potential biases and motives behind the information presented. Without these skills, individuals are more likely to fall prey to false narratives, sensationalised headlines, and manipulation by various actors with vested interests.

The Vibrant Information Barometer (2021)² highlights that the population in Albania is generally not highly prepared to assess the quality and validity of information and media consumption. Although media consumption is relatively high, and interactive formats in traditional media, online media, and especially social networks are available and used, they also tend to reinforce the existing communication bubbles. On the other hand, even though the media environment is diverse and has the needed infrastructure to operate, fact-checking and verifying information, along with the quality of information, are not at the same level, leading to the spread of misinformation-especially in online media.³

The European Media Literacy Index 2023⁴ ranks Albania at the bottom (38th out of 41) leaving behind only North Macedonia, Kosovo and Georgia. Compared to last year, Albania has dropped one place, which indicates that the situation is deteriorating instead of improving. Even though there are multiple sources of information available, the quality and independence of information are persistently problematic, while the concentration of the media market has intensified⁵. In such a situation, it becomes essential for both the government and civil society organisations in Albania to prioritise media and information literacy initiatives. But have they?

¹ https://www.shish.gov.al/pages/lajme/raporti_2020.html

² <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/vibe-albania-2021.pdf>

³ Ibid.

⁴ <https://osis.bg/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/MLI-report-in-English-22.06.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/vibe-albania-2021.pdf>

Even though the first efforts for Media and Information Literacy (MIL) in education in Albania date back a decade ago, in the last three years there has been a noticeable shift in attention towards it. This is mostly motivated by the availability of funds for such initiatives on the one hand, and the necessity of responding to the situation, on the other. However, the number of MIL initiatives has increased, but not much has changed when it comes to the role that public institutions play compared to that of civil society, where the latter remains more active⁶. Yet, in the best-case scenario, there is cooperation between civil society organisations and public education institutions.

Since 2020, with the support of UNESCO, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MES) through the Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (AQAPE), and the Albanian Media Institute (AMI) have been working on incorporating MIL in the official curricula of formal pre-university education. The efforts started with a piloting phase in 30 schools and now the aim is to expand it on a national level, turning it from an ad-hoc to a systemic intervention. Another important contribution for MIL in pre university education was done by IREX in Albania, through the project “Learn to Discern”.

Even though schools and public institutions have been collaborative in this regard, MIL needs to be reflected as a priority in the National Education Strategy, as in the current document for 2021 – 2026 it was not listed as such. Instead, the Strategy focuses on lifelong learning competencies in general and digital skills in particular, leaving out the core competencies of MIL, which are higher critical-thinking skills that students will need beyond the education system. The lack of MIL is noticed in the Curricular Framework for pre-university education⁷ and the National Strategy for Development and Integration 2021 – 2030, where again, the emphasis is on digital competencies. Digital competencies are important, however, it is crucial that the curricula reflect the media and information competencies, which would in turn increase the quality of education and media literacy level in society.

On the other hand, MIL in university education, even though partially covered, has been a domain covered by faculties of public and private universities, offering journalism and communication programs, either at a Bachelor and/or Master’s level. Depending on the study program, these concepts include media literacy, audience, digital competence, multimedia content production, etc., but what remains to be emphasised is the

⁶ <http://www.institutemedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Roli-i-Institucioneve-Publike-ne-Zhvillimin-e-Edukimit-mbi-Median-dhe-Informacionin-ne-Shqiperi.pdf>

⁷ <https://ascap.edu.al/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Korniza-Kurrikulare.pdf>

lack of general training for MIL. However, since 2021 with the support of the United States Embassy in Tirana, the Albanian Media Institute in cooperation with public and private universities, are working on introducing MIL in other study programs, other than journalism. As a result of this project, more than 20 Faculties have collaborated in these initiatives, which aim to make MIL a part of different study programs, mostly as an elective course or through curricula integration.

On the other hand, the Audiovisual Media Authority is dedicating attention to MIL in particular, providing support for organisation of different activities that raise awareness on the topic, as well as by publishing reports and materials which are publicly available. Additionally, in the new Code of Broadcasting, for the first time, provisions for hate speech and sexism are included, which are strongly related to diversity representation in the media and cultural literacy.

Methodology

Goal and objectives

The main goal of the research is to describe the state of Media and Information Literacy in Albania for the period 2020 – 2023, focusing on the key initiatives implemented and identifying needs for future actions.

The objectives of the research are as follows:

- Analysing the current state of MIL Albania for the period 2020 – 2023 by reviewing key strategic/policy documents and reports
- Identifying key donors and actors that are working in the MIL field
- Identifying best practices and needs for future action in the MIL field.

10

Documents
Reviewed

40

Questionnaires
Fulfilled

6

Interviews
conducted

Participants

The key participants targeted for this research were stakeholders that are contributing to Media and Information Literacy, in one way or another, including public institutions, schools and universities, media outlets, media organisations, civil society organisations and libraries.

In total, 46 participants from the above-mentioned categories have contributed to this report, out of which 40 filled out the online questionnaire and 6 others gave online in-depth interviews.

Data gathering

The process of gathering secondary and primary data has been a challenge considering the limited time in disposal. The data were gathered from May – July 2023.

The first step was the collection and review of relevant strategic/policy and reports. The relevant documents reviewed for this purpose were the National Strategy of Education 2021 – 2026, curricular framework for Pre-University Education, National Strategy for Development, and Integration 2021 – 2030, the Code of Broadcasting for the Audiovisual Media, and policy briefs and reports pertaining to the topic and country.

The second step was the dissemination of the online questionnaire via Google Forms. The questionnaire was designed for the purposes of this research and contained five sections, including general information on the respondents; cooperation and synergies between key stakeholders contributing on MIL; data on the MIL initiatives implemented and the last section on the needs for MIL.

The third step was the conduction of online interviews, which were done mostly via Zoom and social media applications, based on the availability of the respondents. The interview was designed as such to gather more detailed information on the approach followed for MIL, the challenges encountered and best practices.

Data analysis

Considering the purpose of the research, descriptive statistics have been used for the quantitative data gathered through questionnaire and thematic analysis for the qualitative data gathered through interviews.

The key data is presented through graphics, text analysis, and quotations from the in-depth interviews.

Limitations of the research

Availability of resources – MIL is a relatively new and complex concept and there are few resources available to consult for the purposes of this research. Most of them focus on either one or some aspects of MIL, but none covers it in a comprehensive manner.

Small number of participants – The number of respondents is limited compared to the actual number of actors contributing to MIL and that affects the generalisability of the research findings.



Results

This section of the reports presents the key findings, organised in three main categories: the data on MIL initiatives for 2020 – 2023; support and cooperation for MIL; challenges and needs assessment for future action. Prior to these, some general data will be provided regarding those who participated in the research to understand more about the key actors that are contributing to MIL in Albania.

MIL initiatives during 2020 – 2023

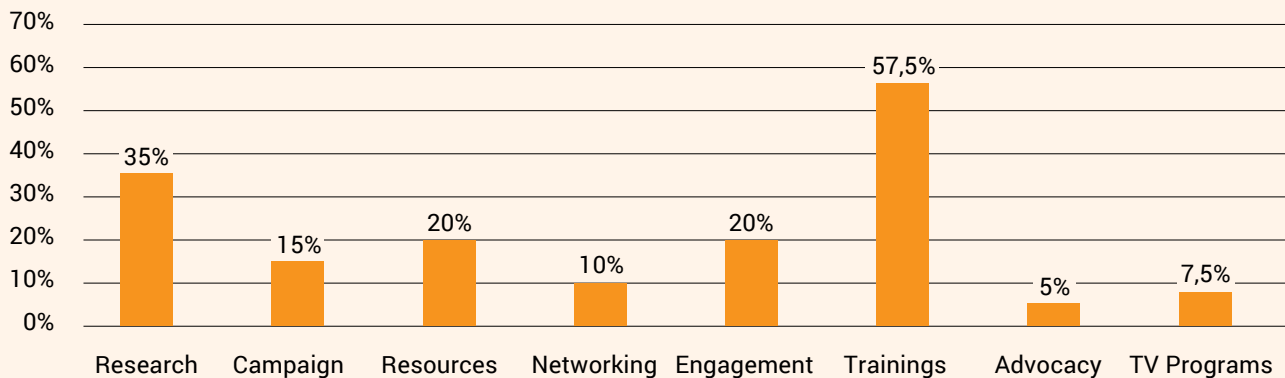
The majority of participants completing the questionnaire belonged to the category of formal education institutions of pre-university and university level (62%), followed by CSOs (20%), media (8%), public institutions (6%) and the remaining (4%) were training agencies and libraries. In total we had identified 11 categories of actors contributing on MIL and out of that 5 categories are not covered in this report (online education platforms, audio-visual industry, ICT sector, MIL networks and researcher's community) because none of these actors participated.

In terms of geographical coverage, the vast majority (62.5%) operate in national level, followed by a considerable percentage that operates both on a regional (WB6) and international level (22.5%), while a small percentage (15%) operates on a local and district level. Since the largest number of participants belongs to the category of formal education

institutions, which operate on a national level, it is an indicator that for massive and sustainable outreach of MIL initiatives, education institutions should be a crucial part of the chain. Majority of actors working in regional (WB6) and international level, as well as to local and district level belong to the CSOs sector.

Almost all respondents (95%) had taken at least one MIL initiative during 2020 – 2023. Based on the responses the most dominant type of activities carried out were trainings (57.5%), followed by research/studies (35%), design and publication of resources (20%), community engagement (20%), awareness rising campaign (15%) and the remaining were networking (10%), TV programs (7.5%) and the last was advocacy (5%).

MIL Actions taken 2020 - 2023



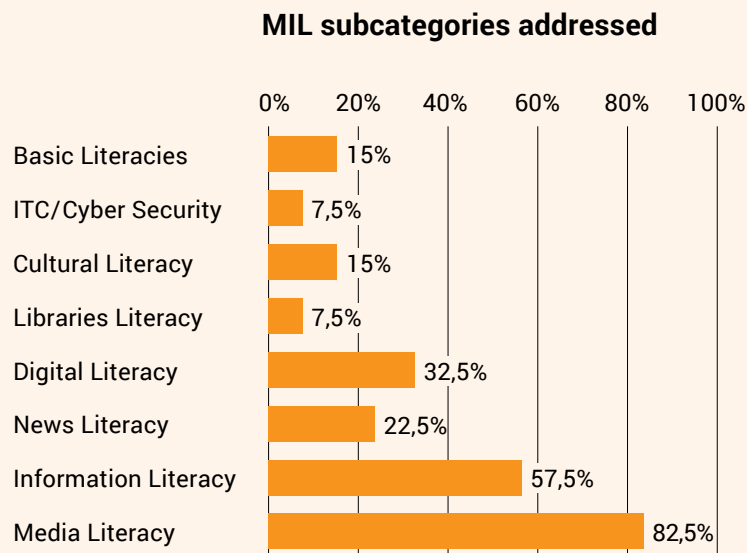
The actions taken by the respondents include usually more than one activity, however the fact that the predominant action taken are trainings, that impacts the widespread and effectiveness of MIL on a broader level, as usually trainings are restricted to a certain number of participants and have a short duration. The second category of actions is related to research/studies, which is a positive indicator considering the lack of evidence-based reports in this regard, however, more needs to be done to support the academic community in generating knowledge and data, scientifically.

Design and dissemination of resources and community engagement on the other hand, remain at low levels, which means that this area of action needs to be improved considering the end goal of MIL: active, well-informed citizenship. The surprising fact is that the least amount of actions taken during 2020 – 2023 in regard to MIL are advocacy and TV programs, both two important tools to advance MIL amongst the general public as well as to make it a priority on a national level.

• MIL aspects addressed through these initiatives and activities

Media and information literacy – as UNESCO defines⁸ - “is an interrelated set of competencies that help people to maximise advantages and minimise harm in the new information, digital and communication landscapes. Media and information literacy covers competencies that enable people to critically and effectively engage with information, other forms of content, the institutions that facilitate information and diverse types of content, and the discerning use of digital technologies. Capacities in these areas are indispensable for all citizens regardless of their ages or backgrounds.”

In line with this definition, participants were asked to list the MIL subcategories that they covered in their initiatives. The majority of actions were focused on media literacy (82.5%), followed by information literacy (57.5%), digital literacy (32.5%) and news literacy (22.5%). The least covered categories of MIL are related to the ICT/Cyber security (7.5%), cultural literacy (15%) and library literacy (7.5%). A new unexplored topic which remains is AI which is a recent development and more needs to be done to educate different audiences.



The high number of initiatives focused on media, information and news literacy is fundamental for the country context where the media environment is highly polarised, lacks professionalism and editorial independence is jeopardised. Amongst other problems, the primary issue remains: “political propaganda transferring from social networks to the media space and the overall trend of publishing information without verifying sources, checking facts, or providing necessary context. Online media continue to

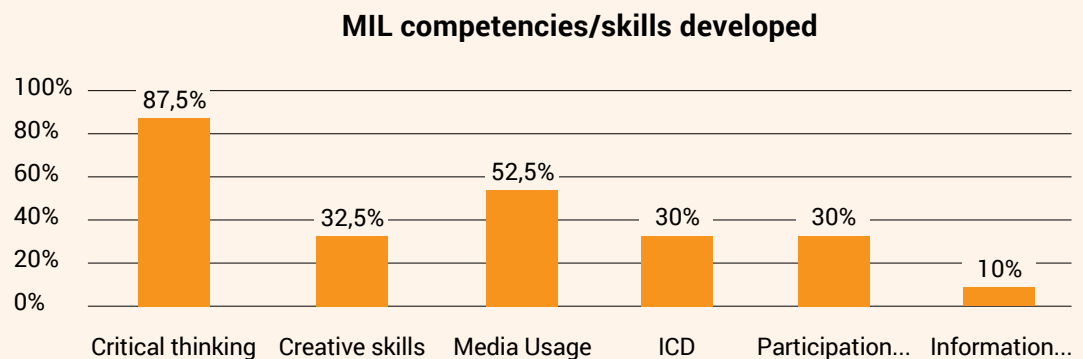
⁸ <https://www.unesco.org/en/media-information-literacy/about>

be especially problematic, tending to emphasize quick publication of news without verification. Their habit of copying/pasting from other outlets further amplifies the veracity problems.”⁹ In this context, it is a matter of urgency to educate the public with the intention of increasing Media and Information Literacy.

Nevertheless, the downside of this reality is that by focusing mostly on media, news and information literacy we lag behind in other literacies, for example digital and cyber security, AI, etc. which develop each day develop with giant steps, while we are currently working in small steps. The fact that the formal education curricula, either in pre-university and university level, does not respond and neither reflects the current stage of developments, is a guarantee that no matter how much or how good the initiatives can be, we will always be steps behind in the process of educating the general public on how to use effectively what they already were using for years in a certain way. This becomes a matter of unlearning and then relearning.

• MIL skills/competencies developed

The predominant skills that have been promoted or developed through the actions on MIL during 2020 – 2023 are critical thinking (87.5%), followed by media usage (52.5%), content creation skills (32.5%), intercultural dialogue and civic engagement (30% each) and the last was the evaluation/assessment of information (10%). Even though it is hard to measure the level of change in a critical thinking aspect for objective reasons as well as it being difficult to change people’s mindsets about the media and information environment, all respondents highlight it as the most crucial component of MIL.



⁹ <https://www.irex.org/files/vibrant-information-barometer-2022-albania>

“The fundamental aspect of MIL is development of critical thinking skills, which is the cornerstone of a developed and democratic society, where citizens are well-informed and hold institutions accountable.”

Blerjana Bino

Executive Director

Science for Innovation and Development

At the same level of difficulty in inciting critical thinking is also the change in media consumption. Before being educated about how to use it properly, students have been exposed to and have been using media for a long time, therefore challenging their existing media consumption patterns is not an easy task. That becomes even harder, when considering the chaotic and toxic media environment in Albania, which gives little to no space of healthy media consumption habits. However, the fact that young people receive some additional information on how media works, how the messages are constructed based on certain political views or interests, how media ownership impacts the angle of the news that is transmitted, are all factors that one should be aware of before taking everything for granted.

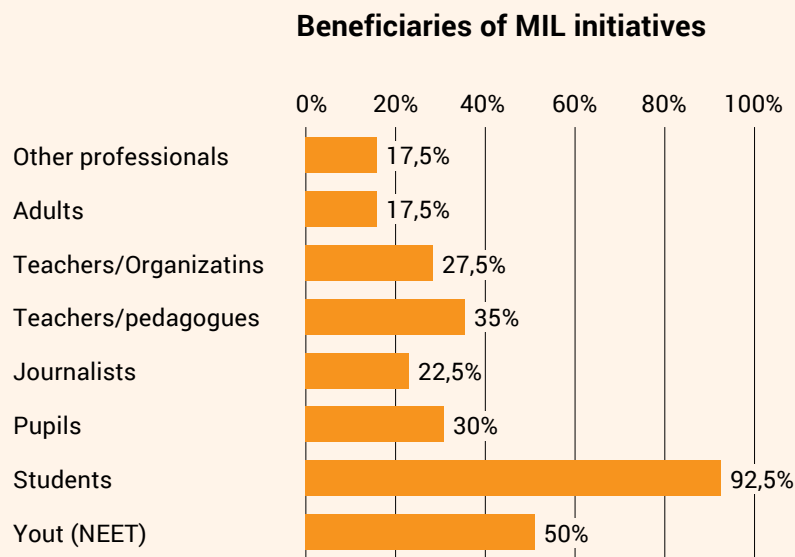
On the other hand, content creation skills are the easiest to measure as they come with a product which is publishable, such are blog articles, videos, campaigns, posters, etc. Yet, this is the most difficult level to reach, because to be on this level one must already master critical thinking, as stated in this evaluation report¹⁰.

At the same level of difficulty in inciting critical thinking is also the change in media consumption. Before being educated about how to use it properly, students have been exposed to and have been using media for a long time, therefore challenging their existing media consumption patterns is not an easy task. That becomes even harder, when considering the chaotic and toxic media environment in Albania, which gives little to no space of healthy media consumption habits. However, the fact that young people receive some additional information on how media works, how the messages are constructed based on certain political views or interests, how media ownership impacts the angle of the news that is transmitted, are all factors that one should be aware of before taking everything for granted.

¹⁰ <https://emi-mil.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Evaluative-Research-Report-1.pdf>

• Main beneficiaries of the initiatives

Based on the responses from questionnaire, the majority of direct beneficiaries of MIL actions have been students (92.5%), followed by NEET youths (Not in Employment Education and Training) (50%), pupils (30%), journalists (22.5%), teachers/professors (35%), organisations/institutions (27.5%) and other adults/professionals (17.5%).



The vast majority of citizens benefiting from MIL action, are mostly youths, aged 14 – 30 years old. While this is a positive indicator itself, we notice that there are two critical age groups that are not reached by any intervention. The first are children, in the lower education and preschool level, and the second is the third age or 30+, who are not in the CSO sector nor in education. While the current actions try to reach as many people as possible, these two age groups are not included as target groups. However, the stakeholders interviewed emphasize the importance of having inclusive MIL programs that reach everyone, according to their needs and regardless of their age.

“We are extremely behind when it comes to Media and Information Literacy. Let alone, we work mostly with pupils and students, but we forget that they have already developed their media consumption habits from their parents from a very young age. Parents, are totally off the table and we need to bring them in, for the change to happen.”

Alban Tufa
Assistant Lecturer
“Beder” University

“MIL actions need to target the whole population, starting from children to the third generation, as everyone is consuming media and few are those who are doing it in a healthy or appropriate manner.”

Miriam Neziri

Communication and Media expert
Canal France International

“I would advise that projects with a focus on MIL should be widely disseminated both at the academic, university and pre-university level, but also in the general audience that is not part of these environments and that needs general information on how to distinguish real news from the fake ones.”

Ani Turhani

University of Tirana
Faculty of History and Philology

• **Duration of the actions**

One of the main issues of the MIL initiatives is that they are donor-dependent and have a short life, in most of the cases. After the support from the donor is finished or the priorities of the donor's change, so do the efforts and initiatives, except for the cases where such action is strongly associated with the mission and vision of the organisation/institution.

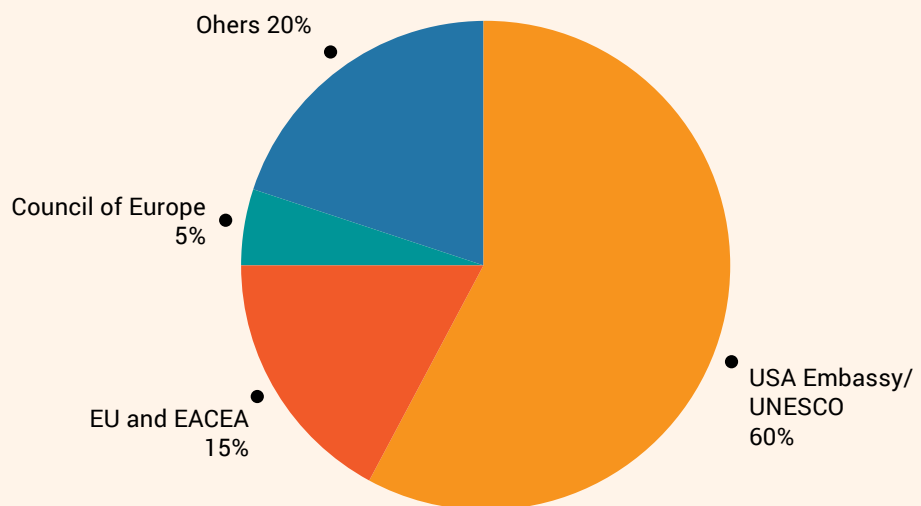
Based on the responses received, the duration of the action for MIL in 2020 – 2023 varies between less than 6 months (40%), 12 months (40%), more than 2 years (17.5%), and only in one case it started since 2015 known as the Program of National Library of Albania, which trains students and pupils every year on information literacy and how to access the resources offline and online.

Except for the initiatives of AMI in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Sports, and with universities, which have exceeded 2 years of implementation, the others are short-term and ad-hoc interventions. For the sustainability of MIL, it is important that the public funds, amongst others funds, become available and consistent for public education institutions and CSOs.

Support and Cooperation for MIL

Participants were asked to identify the main donors who were supporting MIL in Albania in the period 2020 – 2023. Not surprisingly, the most dominant donors were different embassies, specifically USA Embassy in Tirana and UNESCO (60%) because these two donors are supporting MIL initiatives which are implemented on a country level in cooperation with formal education institutions in pre-university and university levels.

Main donors supporting MIL



UNESCO (60%) because these two donors are supporting MIL initiatives which are implemented on a country level in cooperation with formal education institutions in pre-university and university levels.

The European Union and EACEA (15%), Council of Europe (5%) were also listed amongst main donors. However, there was a considerable percentage (20%) that mentioned “other donors” including Erasmus+, Audiovisual Media Authority, Albanian Media Institute, IREX and Government of France.

Additionally, we asked the participants to identify key MIL actors that contribute to MIL advancement in the country and that list comprises of media organisations, CSOs, formal education institutions, public institutions, media community and international organisations.

Nr.	Media Organisations/ CSOs	Public Institutions	Formal Education Institutions	International Organisations/ Bodies	Media Community
1	Albanian Media Institute	Ministry of Education and Sports	University of Tirana	EU Delegation in Albania	Union of Journalists
2	Albanian Center for Quality Journalism	Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education	“Beder” University	Media Diversity Institute	TV (Public Broadcaster mostly)
3	Faktoje.al	Audiovisual Media Authority	“Ismail Qemali” University	USAID/IREX	Albanian Media Council
4	Balkan Investigative Network of Albania - Sci-Dev	National Library of Albania	“Eqerem Cabej” University	UNESCO	
5	Citizens Channel	Public libraries in local level/schools	Pre-university education Schools	EMO	
6	Beyond Barriers			Albanian Helsinki Committee	

When it comes to cooperation or joint actions for MIL, 20% of respondents have not had cooperation with any organisation and/or institution during 2020 – 2023. While 80% of respondents have had cooperation with organisations/institutions within the country and internationally.

The nature of cooperation for those who answered “yes” varies in nature, but it is multiple, where the prevailing form of cooperation includes that within the framework of projects, research/studies, trainings, campaigns, as well as translation and/or publication of resources, production of multi-media contents, etc. Here are some of the samples shared by respondents.

“The collaboration was part of a European Project supported by Erasmus+ program and was created by information professionals, university professors and trainers from Italy, Spain, Albania, Slovakia, Serbia and North Macedonia. The cooperation has lasted 2 years and is still ongoing. The main achievement of the project is the creation of a European e-learning platform for MIL and the fight against disinformation called Fakespotting¹¹.”

Rrapo Zguri

Lecturer

Department of Journalism and
Communication, UT.

¹¹ <https://fakespottingproject.eu/>

"We cooperated with Albanian Media Institute in the frame of the "MIL in University Level" supported by USA Embassy in Tirana, where we developed instruments and tools as well as trainings in university level. Additional to that, with UNESCO on the Project "Building Trust in Media and in South East Europe and Turkey, Phase II" where as a result of that cooperation we developed MIL modules for a MIL MOOC course¹² available in Albanian language. Again, with the support of AMI and Reporting Diversity Network 2.0 we created contents and online campaign on Counteracting on Hate Speech."

Edlira Gjoni

Founder & Executive Director
Impact Center

"For more than 2 years, the Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (AQAPE) in cooperation with the Albanian Media Institute and with the support of UNESCO and United Nations, is implementing the Project "Media and Information Literacy in Formal Education" which has been piloted in about 30 schools in Albania and just recently [has been] extended to the professional networks of teachers which promises a wider spread and inclusion of MIL throughout the country."

Elisabeta Paja

Curricula Development Specialist
AQAPE

"In the framework of the Project MIL in universities, we worked with youth of the Korça District for the media education of young people and the application of media knowledge in the conduction of several shows in RTSh Korca. The cooperation lasted 5 months and was quite successful leading in two tangible results: first, the formation of a core of young people for the dissemination of knowledge about MIL and second, realisation of 3 television shows on different topics that affect young people."

Anyla Saraçi

"Fan S. Noli"
University, Korça

"The "Equality in Decision-Making" network in cooperation with Era Film and with the financial support of the European Union have implemented the initiative called "Make It Visible" in 2022. The initiative brought together a cinematographic production company and a civil society organisation to create the series "Power Square"¹³ which reflects the reality and challenges of investigative journalism.

¹² <https://www.mediasmart.me/sq/>

¹³ <https://erafilm-albania.com/sq/portfolios/katrori-i-pushtetit/>

As part of this initiative, 15 workshops were organized in universities, high schools and open spaces in Tirana, Elbasan, Durrës and Shkodër. These workshops served as a common space for networking, communication, discussion among 1000 young students, experts, and professionals on the series "Power Square" which covers 6 important topics such as: (1) Media Freedom, (2) Democracy & Media, (3) Gender Equality & Media, (4) Human Rights and Media, (5) Health & Media, (6) Justice & Media."

Elsa Dautaj

Project Coordinator
The Network Equity in Decision-making

"Citizens Channel together with the organisation "Faktoje" have been supported by IREX Albania for media education. We have conducted trainings in 8 cities of Albania with young people from high school. In the first phase, "Faktoje" has developed training for facts and disinformation, while in the second phase, Citizens Channel for multimedia reporting and media ethics. In the end, Faktoje trained 300 young people, while Citizens Channel trained 150 young people. After completing the training, the young people were introduced to concepts such as media education, media ethics, multimedia, disinformation, fake news, etc. as well as being able to develop [a] critical analysis for the various news brought for discussion. Also, we managed to be in contact with young people, mentoring them in the realisation of multimedia products from the cities where they live, for topics that concern them/inspirational stories which are not often reflected in the media space.

Citizens Channel has also been able, through the support from the "Media for All" program, to build an online platform dedicated, among others, to media education, called "Sheshit"¹⁴. Being an open platform for anyone who wants to be equipped with a set of skills and practical knowledge about how the media product is consumed."

Erisa Kryeziu

Journalist
"Citizens Channel"

"Sci-Dev in cooperation with BIRN and with the support of the European Union, has conducted a research and mapping of the disinformation elements in Albania influenced by Iran, China, and Russia and after that we did some info sessions and workshops with students in Shkodra, Tirana and Vlora. Part of that cooperation is the development of the disinfo.al¹⁵ platform which is available and contains information for relevant studies on disinformation."

Blerjana Bino

Executive Director
Sci-Dev

¹⁴ <https://sheshit.com/>

¹⁵ <https://disinfo.al/>

“With the support of AMI, with two of my colleagues we developed the first validated instrument that measures the MIL levels using 11 MIL dimensions.”

Alban Tufa

Assistant Lecturer
“Beder” University

Even though nearly half of respondents (45.7%) highlight the cooperation they have had as positive and effective, it is most important to emphasise that the majority (54.3%) draw attention to the fact that there are still lots of improvements to make in this regard, for example the formalisation of the cooperation between organisations and institutions working in this field; the recognition of a group of experts that are cable and professionally recognised to cover such topics; media outlets need to be more involved; the cooperation needs to be strengthened and become sustainable; the initiatives need more visible for the larger audience to be able to reach and access it.

MIL: Challenges and needs to be addressed

Similarly to the complexity of MIL itself, are the challenges that different stakeholders face when implementing or working in this field. The majority of the challenges are associated with **a lack of a strategic approach in addressing MIL** a) through formal education, in early, pre-university and university education; b) informal education (CSOs) and c) through mass media.

The recognition of the term remains a challenge, in particular for the National Library, which emphasised that more should be done to introduce the term to broader audiences, as currently that is limited mainly to students. *“The term is still new and not widely recognised, let alone skills and competencies.”*

Renida Fero

National Library of Albania

The formal education curricula do not respond nor reflect the current developments, which means that pupils and students become “expert users” of media and information tools, without having the “expertise” and knowledge to understand and use it properly. The current aspects covered by the formal curricula are the digital competencies, which are important but outdated, as they teach basic levels of using digital tools, and do not cover MIL in its entirety.

The segmentation of audience which includes reaching mainly students/ youths and excluding all other categories which need MIL the most. Parents have been brought to the attention by this report as a key segment of audience to reach children, as many of their media consumption behaviours or perceptions are “inherited” by parents or other family members. The same applies to the third age, who are more prone to be “victims” of fake news, clickbait titles and other information disorders.

“We must find a way to involve parents in our initiatives. They can be reached through other grassroots organisations that already have a relationship with parents, or through schools. It is important we educate parents on MIL, as well.”

Alban Tufa

Assistant Lecturer
“Beder” University

Limited funding. The majority of donors have their priorities which often do not reflect the needs of the general population, even for MIL topics. The available funding supports mainly ad-hoc initiatives rather than systemic change.

The complexity of the field, which requires more than technical skills and tools; it necessitates mindset change, which takes time, and the progress is slow. Besides, new things emerge every day and therefore, it is hard to measure the impact of initiatives.

“MIL is very complex, as it is not only a matter of technical skills, but has a variety of complexities including geopolitics, hate speech and freedom of expression, perceptions, and mental representations, as well as media consumption patterns. We have noticed that high media polarisation in Albania creates division based on these political ideologies which have made people resistant to critical thinking, or towards MIL.”

Blerjana Bino

Executive Director
Sci-Dev

The clash of interest between media outlets and stakeholders interested in MIL. The majority of the media are profit-driven rather than responsibility or education driven, meaning that the media is interested in what sells, such as clickbait, sensational titles, misinformation and disinformation.

“The main challenge is the 'unfair competition' between verified and quality reporting, which requires physical time, commitment and sufficient resources, and sensational news that attracts much more readers. The latter are "fished"”

through headlines and bombastic contents that affect readers emotionally, or photos/videos that attract visually through manipulation. In other words, a well-thought-out package to sell, or get clicks, has succeeded in attracting more people than a verified news or information can attract.”

Viola Keta

Editor in Chief
Faktoje.al

“There are many clashes of interest between the media service providers to be taken into account...however, I can say that the public is becoming more active and engaged through the complaints that they send to the Council, when they notice violation of the Code of Ethics or Standards of Journalism. The number of complaints has increased and so does their quality of writing.”

Mirela Oktrova

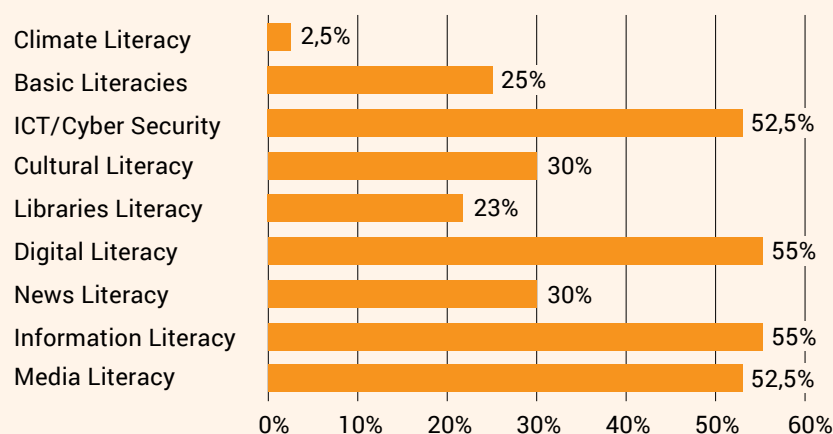
Head of Council of Complaints
AMA

What should be the MIL priorities for future action?

Top MIL subcategories identified as priorities for future action include information literacy (55%), digital literacy (55%), ICT and cybersecurity (52.5%), media literacy (52.5%), cultural literacy (30%) news literacy (30%) and basic literacies (25%). A new category of literacy referred to as climate literacy has emerged (2.5%).

Compared to what has been done during these three years that the study covers, we notice that there is slight shift of information literacy, digital literacy and ICT/Cyber security for future action in comparison to media and news literacy, yet these are considered as the most important aspects that MIL initiatives need to address.

MIL Priorities



Conclusions

During 2020 – 2023 MIL has received a particularly important attention and support, which has resulted in an increased number of initiatives taken in this regard. The initiatives include short-term ad-hoc interventions, as well as more systemic actions referring to those which are implemented in cooperation with public institutions and formal education institutions.

However, the country still lacks a strategic approach in addressing MIL in national level, through formal education in early, pre-university and university level. The current strategic documents refer only to the digital skills and ICT, broadly mentioning competence-based learning, however MIL is not explicitly included neither in the National Agenda for Development and Integration 2021 – 2023 nor the National Education Strategy 2021 – 2026. Incorporation of MIL in formal education curricula is a prerequisite for the improvement of MIL, which currently shows to be in very low levels.

Government support for MIL is inexistent in terms of financial contribution, and the main donors for the examined period are USA Embassy in Tirana, UNESCO, European Union, through different programmes, Council of Europe.

The majority of actions were focused on media literacy, information literacy, digital literacy, and news literacy. The least covered categories of MIL are related to the ICT/Cyber security, cultural literacy, and library literacy. A new unexplored topic that remains is AI which is a recent development and more needs to be done to educate different audiences on this.

Direct beneficiaries of MIL actions have been students, NEET youths (Not in Employment Education and Training), pupils, journalists, teachers/professors, organisations/institutions, and other adults/professionals.





Recommendations

Develop a National MIL Strategy: Given the increased attention and support received for MIL initiatives during 2020-2023, it is essential for the country to develop a comprehensive National Media and Information Literacy Strategy. This strategy should be formulated in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, including public institutions, formal education institutions, and civil society organisations. It should outline clear goals, objectives, and action plans to address MIL in early, pre-university, and university-level formal education, as well as for the general public.

Incorporate MIL in Formal Education Curricula: To improve MIL levels and ensure its sustainability, the government should make the inclusion of MIL in formal education curricula a top priority. Media and Information Literacy should be explicitly integrated into subjects or taught as a standalone module. By doing so, students can develop critical thinking, analytical, and digital skills necessary to navigate the ever-evolving media landscape responsibly.

Promote AI Literacy: Recognising the emerging significance of Artificial Intelligence (AI), efforts should be made to include AI literacy in MIL initiatives. Providing education on AI-related concepts, ethical considerations, and implications for society will empower individuals to make informed decisions and participate actively in the digital age.

Focus on Underrepresented Categories: The current focus on media literacy, information literacy, digital literacy, and news literacy is commendable, but attention should also be given to underrepresented categories such as ICT/Cyber security, cultural literacy, and library literacy. These areas play a crucial role in fostering an active, well-informed citizenry.

Empower Educators/teachers/pedagogues: Equipping educators with the necessary training and resources to teach MIL effectively is essential. Professional development programs for teachers should be developed to ensure they can effectively deliver MIL content and integrate it into their teaching practices.

Promote Public Awareness and Engagement: Raising public awareness about the importance of MIL is essential. Engaging citizens through media campaigns, workshops, and community events can foster a culture of media literacy and encourage active participation in MIL initiatives.

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Interviews

Alban Tufa - Assistant Lecturer, Beder University

Blerjana Bino - Executive Director, Science for Innovation and Development

Mirela Oktrova - Head of Council of Complaints, Audiovisual Media Authority

Miriam Neziri - Communication and Media Expert, Canal France International

Renida Fero - Researcher/Bibliographer, National Library of Albania

Viola Keta - Editor in Chief, Faktoje.al



Media and information literacy in Croatia

Research on the needs and existing practices

Executive summary

This research presents an overview of the current state of Media and Information Literacy¹ in Croatia and was conducted alongside research on the same topic in Albania and Serbia during the months of May, June, and July of 2023. The goal of this research is to provide an extensive understanding of the state of MIL in the last three years (2020-2023); a time period which was specifically chosen due to the many changes that this period brought. Some of those changes include higher donor interest in the media and information literacy field, the infodemic period, the new availability of AI technology, widespread mis/dis/mal-information - the so-called information disorder.

¹ In the following text, MIL in the parts related to media and information literacy

This research mapped out and assessed the needs of the media and literacy field in Croatia through qualitative and quantitative research, using both primary and secondary sources of information. The literature overview includes a summary of the most important documents and literature items that highlight the most important initiatives already in place, and how they affect the current state of MIL. The next section focuses on the methodological approach, explaining how we mapped out the initiatives/projects that have been/are implemented in formal and non-formal education. Through a questionnaire and the use of in-depth interviews, we gathered primary data which was analysed to assess the needs of media and information literacy in formal and non-formal education. The results have shown great potential in the field of media literacy in Croatia, along with some systematic problems, such as the lack of professional help with conducting MIL policies and the lack of dedicated research. The results of the assessment is followed by a discussion, a conclusion chapter and recommendations based on the presented findings.

Literature review

As a primary data source, we reviewed the most important bibliographical items tackling the issue of MIL in Croatia, such as national and international regulations, policy documents and reports, studies, handbooks, and articles on MIL in Croatia. Here we will present an analytical summary of the four most important items.

The specific bibliographical items which were analysed show four points of view: how Croatia stands in the field of MIL from an international point of view (the report on MIL in Croatia by an international body), the national governments' plans for future development (Croatia's government official National development strategy), current positive actions (a brochure about media literacy and journalism published on Croatia's most important MIL internet platform *Medijskapismenost.hr*²) how Croatia currently stands compared to other countries in the European context (a survey showing Croatia's media literacy index compared to other European countries). The summaries of these four documents will provide an understanding of the current situation in Croatia.

Croatia faces challenges in improving digital and media literacy skills. The European Digital Media Observatory, when establishing the Media Literacy Country Profile uses recent research³ stating that 87% of people

² To visit full website, see [Medijska pismenost -portal](#), accessed 22.6.2023

³ Zrinjka Peruško, "Croatia," Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2022. Accessed 21.6.2023.
<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2022/croatia>

access news online and 60% access through social media (Peruško, 2022). The country lacks an official media literacy policy and dedicated institutions as well as a greater support from public authorities. The Agency for Electronic Media (Agencija za elektroničke medije) collaborates with partners like UNICEF but lacks sufficient public support. A survey found that only 8% of respondents learned to critically analyse media content, mainly younger people with a higher education. Social media serves as the primary information platform for those under 35, but only 23.1% verify information before sharing. Participating in EduMediaTest, Croatia's teenagers lacked critical skills and understanding of the work of media platforms. The AEM⁴ promotes media literacy through initiatives like *Media Literacy Days* and a national portal (EDMO).

Media literacy education is not systematically included in the national curriculum, and therefore it relies on individual teachers' willingness to teach. Developed resources primarily target children and young people, with limited resources for adults. Stakeholders like Djeca Medija, the Center for a Safer Internet (Centar za sigurniji internet), Telecentar, the Croatian Film Association (Hrvatski filmski savez), Association Alternator, and Bacači Sjenki are involved in media literacy initiatives. Their work aims to raise awareness, foster critical thinking, and enhance safety in the digital media landscape³ (EDMO).

“Media literacy is one of the key competencies of the 21st century. Although there are many definitions of media literacy, most include the assumption that a media literate person is trained to (1) access media content, (2) analyse it, (3) critically evaluate it, but also (4) create it independently” (Lechpamer, 2023: 4). We mention this section from the brochure because it is a part of a greater initiative by the Agency for Electronic media (Agencija za elektroničke medije) and UNICEF Croatia. These educational materials are published by the Agency for Electronic Media and UNICEF in collaboration with *medijskapismenost.hr*, which is the biggest project for media literacy in Croatia. This platform produces educational materials, such as brochures and video lectures which are available for free to facilitate discussions and workshops on media literacy. The initiative highlights the need for collaboration between schools, media, and families to provide a healthier and more balanced use of the Internet and to enhance critical thinking skills in consuming media content. Furthermore, the platform organises a Media Literacy Day which includes various activities, workshops, and events held in schools, libraries, kindergartens, and other institutions in almost all Croatian cities. This particular brochure includes theoretical materials as well as 7 exercises and a quiz. Through these exercises, students can practice critical reading, watching, or listening

⁴Full name: The Agency for Electronic Media

Methodological approach

Goal and objectives

The objectives are to analyse the current state of MIL in Croatia, focusing on national strategies and policies for development of MIL, identifying key stakeholders working in the field of media literacy on formal and informal education. And the last objective is to assess local needs in the media and literacy field in Croatia as well as to recognise the best practices.

Data gathering and analysis

The research was conducted in three stages. The first stage included the gathering and analysing of secondary data, the second stage involved the gathering of primary data, and the last stage included the analysis and summary of the results. The first stage started with the collection and review of relevant literature and critically analysing the most important bibliographical items. An important step in this part of the research was to gather literature of multiple kinds, varying from national laws and regulations to international reports concerning media literacy in Croatia, to guidelines and handbooks by various Croatian publishers. This step was crucial in understanding the current state of MIL and identifying primary stakeholders as a basis for the next stage.

After we identified the most important stakeholders and their activities, we began gathering primary data by sending out a questionnaire provided by partner institutions. The purpose of gathering data through the questionnaire was to identify active stakeholders, their initiatives, projects, and the current state they are in. Primary data was gathered throughout two weeks between July 1st and July 15th, 2023.

The questionnaire was forwarded to the most important stakeholders in the civil sector, public institutions, online platforms, media outlets, formal and informal education institutions, and 24 answers were gathered. They marked their area of activity as follows: 11 from the civil sector and NGOs, 4 from the media industry, 3 from formal education institutions, and 2 replies came from government/public institutions, online MIL platforms, audio-visual industry, information and communication technology sector, academic/research community, and media literacy networks. One reply was received from the libraries and institutions that provide training for MIL educators. Most of the replies chose multiple categories regarding their area of activity.

The most important stakeholders were contacted, and 13 in-depth interviews were conducted. In-depth interviews were conducted mostly online through video calls. The purpose of the interviews was to gather more

detailed information from the most important stakeholders concerning MIL in Croatia. In the interviews, we focused on identifying the problems they face and the needs that they have regarding their project(s). This way both qualitative and quantitative data was gathered from primary and secondary sources which helped to allow for a thorough understanding of the current state and obstacles standing in the way of MIL in Croatia.

Limitations of the research

The biggest limitation of this research is that not all relevant actors were reached. The biggest group which was not covered was government institutions, which did not answer the questionnaire and did not participate in in-depth interviews. The lack of government officials' opinions in this research results in an overlooked perspective which could provide valuable information about funding, national plans and policies and cooperation between all other stakeholders.



Results

MIL situation in Croatia 2020 – 2023

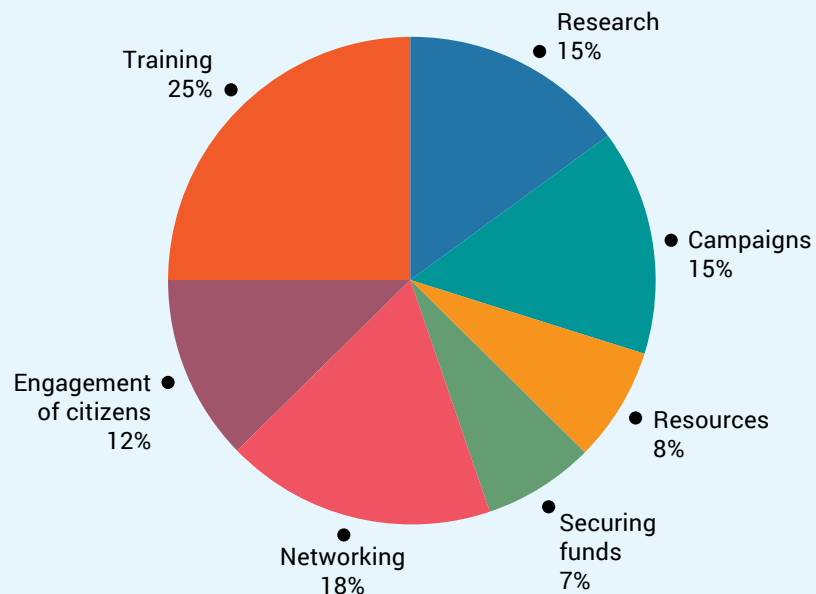
The majority of participants (45%) who filled out the questionnaire were from the NGO sector, followed by the media industry (16%). The next category were formal education institutions (12.5%) and government/public institutions, online MIL platforms, audio-visual industry, information and communication technology sector, academic/research community, and media literacy networks (8.3% each). The least represented were the libraries and institutions that provide training for MIL educators (4.2%). Most of the respondents chose multiple categories regarding their area of activity.

Almost all stakeholders, 83.3%, stated that they operate on a national level. International activities are conducted by 37.5% of stakeholders and those include the Center for Civic Initiatives (online platform *seksizam naš svagdašnji*), Association for Communication and Media Culture, Telecentar, Investigative journalism center, Bacači Sjenki association, GONG, Pragma association, Faktograf, Agency for electronic media. County activity was noted by 33.3% of stakeholders, and local activity by 29.17%. Regional western-Balkan level activity was stated by 16.6% of the stakeholders and those include the Center for Civic Initiatives Poreč, Investigative journalism center, Faktograf and *lupiga.com*. One stakeholder (4.16%) noted that they operate on an intercounty level, and that is the Education and Teacher Training Agency (Agencija za odgoj i obrazovanje). Most of the stakeholders (58.3%) operate on multiple geographical levels, while 41.6% operate in

strictly one area. Those are UNICEF Croatia, A1 Croatia, Childrens creative center "DOKKICA", Croatian audio-visual centre, Blank, Faculty of Political Science of Zagreb University, Nova TV, *medijskapismenost.hr* who operate nationally, *lupiga.com* who operates regionally and association Bacači Sjenki who works internationally.

All of the institutions/organisations who answered the questionnaire answered that they have taken action in the field of media literacy in the period between 2020 and 2023.

Actions taken during the last three years (2020-2023) in the field of media and information literacy

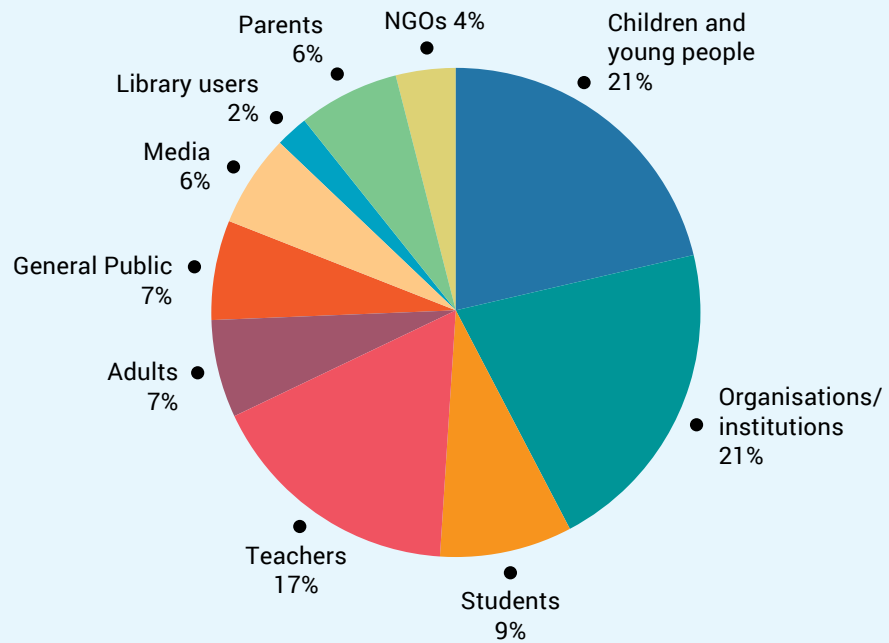


The actions taken in the last three years mostly consisted of training, networking, research, campaigns, and engagement of citizens in that order as shown in the graph. Some answers also stated specific activities like organising multimedia festivals, working in film literacy, or creating school curricula.

The types of projects varied, with most of them relying on networking platforms (mrežne platforme) including conferences, seminars, meetings, online and offline forums, newsletters and databases. More than half of the stakeholders (54.3%) rely on networking platforms. Half of the respondents (50%) used resources, including TV or online content, websites, leaflets, videos, lesson plans, etc., which are related to media literacy. Research (qualitative or quantitative research on media literacy, which has been published or widely used by media literacy practitioners) and campaigns (a combination of raising awareness with desired behaviour change) have 37.5% per category. Citizen engagement (local projects that provide

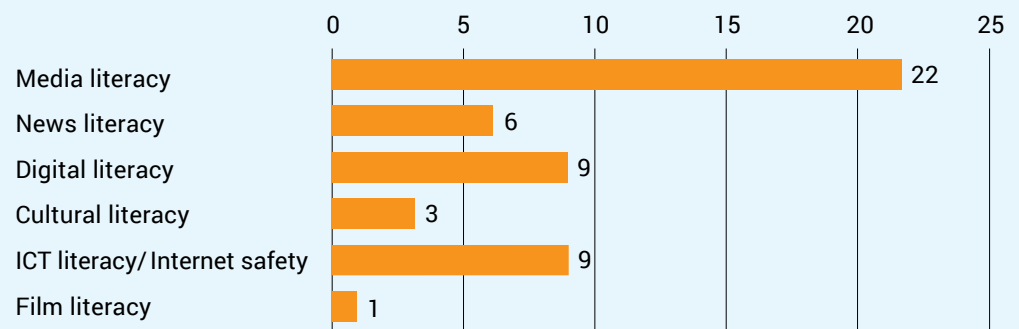
support and information to end users) makes up 33% of all project types and 29.2% policy development includes major consultations, published reports and recommendations. This was a multiple-choice question, and all respondents used a combination of multiple tools in their specific projects.

Direct beneficiaries of the project



The most frequent with 41.6% of projects in Croatia were those aimed towards young people and organisations/institutions as reported by stakeholders participating in the research. Projects for teachers, students, adults, the general public and the media were second most frequent. The smallest number of media and information literacy projects were directed towards library users and NGOs while 54.16% of projects were focused on only one target audience. The rest had a group of beneficiaries such as both students and teachers, institutions, and NGOs, and so on.

Category of media literacy that the project contributed to



Most projects, (91.6%) were targeted towards media literacy, alongside other types of literacy, mostly those concerning digital environments, like ICT literacy and digital literacy (37.5%). None of the projects targeted basic literacy, information literacy or library literacy. News literacy was targeted by 6 projects (25%) while 3 (12.5%) projects targeted cultural literacy and 1 targeted film literacy.

Despite the fact that most of the projects covered media and digital literacy, those covering less represented categories are just as important and successful. **Ingrid Padjen Đurić** is a senior expert advisor for film literacy at the Croatian Audiovisual Center, a public institution that promotes audiovisual activity and production in Croatia, working on the promotion of film literacy. She says that they are currently working on incorporating the field of film literacy in the school curriculum from kindergarten. She said that HAVC also ordered the first written document on film literacy “...that’s how the Analysis of the Situation and Development of film literacy 2023-2027 was created; we are also planning the establishment of a National Commission for film literacy which will bring together all relevant stakeholders from the education sector and civil society associations”. This year HAVC⁶ co-finances the work of film school groups as an extracurricular activity at school and has already given two grants each worth €39,816.84 as a way of supporting film literacy education. They also support small NGOs like BLANK, where **Marko Bičanić**, a film directing student, and his colleagues conduct workshops for developing young authors and people who want to gain an understanding of film literacy including children and adults. He says that regarding film literacy in children, the practice of watching and discussing films has proven to be the best approach.

“Commenting and expressing opinions are extremely important for children because after watching a film in the first workshop, they say, ‘This film is bad, and this one is good’, but after two months of watching and learning critical thinking and analysis, children can explain why a film is bad or good” he says.

The biggest percentage, 54.16% of the projects stated that the most important skills that were planned to be developed by these projects were those connected to critical thinking. This includes understanding the media industry and media messages, making informed choices in media use while questioning the motivations and intentions of content producers, recognizing different types of media content, and assessing content verity, reliability, and value for money. It also includes managing online safety and security risks. A smaller number, 8.3%, stated that their primary goal was the development of creative skills: creating, constructing and generating

⁶ Full name is Croatian Audiovisual Center

media content. Participation and engagement (interaction and participation in society through media, promotion of democratic participation and human rights) takes up 4.16% of the skills targeted, and the correct use of media includes 8,3%. There was also an option named intercultural dialogue (including challenging radicalisation and hate speech online). In case this question didn't provide the skill(s) their project was developing, respondents could use the option "other". Under this questions, the following answers were given: "the emphasis is on critical thinking, but the development of all key media literacy skills is being worked on", "creation of learning and teaching activities for students' media literacy", "both creative skills and use of media", "the project does not directly develop any of the described skills", "all except participation and engagement", "all of the above".

Most of the projects were conducted on a national level (70.8%), 12.5% were developed locally, 8.3% internationally and 4.2% in a county (županijski) and 1 project (4.2%) was active on multiple levels including county, inter-county and national.

The duration of the projects varied; 5 of them were shorter than 6 months, 10 projects were longer than 6 months, 3 projects had a duration of 12 months and 3 lasted for 36 months. The rest of the project used an "other" option and included set durations of 15, 18, 24, 34. The average duration of projects was 15.2 months. The rest of the answers apply to a specific occasion, like the organisation of Fažana Media Fest, which was held once a year for 10 days. They are projects which are still actively being conducted, or those which are a part of regular activities of an educational or public institution.

The data shows that a significant number of projects (10 out of the total) have durations longer than 6 months, indicating that longer-term projects are common. In contrast, only 5 projects are shorter than 6 months, indicating that shorter-term projects are relatively less frequent. Projects with different durations may require different resource allocation strategies. Longer projects may require careful planning, resource allocation, and risk management, while shorter projects may need efficient execution to meet their objectives within the limited period. Shorter projects may need intense and focused resources, while longer projects might demand a more sustainable allocation of resources over time.

The average duration of 15.2 months indicates the typical time it takes to complete a project. This information can be used to set realistic expectations and deadlines for some future projects. It's important to consider the nature of the projects and their objectives while analysing the data.

Some projects might naturally require longer durations due to their complexity or scope, while others might be rather simple and completed in a shorter period of time. The provided data on project durations shows a mix of shorter and longer-term projects. The average duration of 15.2 months gives an idea of the typical project completion time. Analysing the distribution of project durations can help organisations and project managers to make informed decisions about resource allocation, planning, and setting realistic expectations for future projects.

Half of the institutions/organisations marked their projects as being *significant* (50%), while 41.7% rated their projects as *very significant*, and 8.3% of organisations rated their projects as *not so significant*. When asked how they describe the significance of their project, some stated that they do not have the data on how significant the project is or has been, while others, whose projects were active for multiple years, stated that they could see the changes in their target audience such as them returning to workshops next year. One organisation stated their project was very successful despite the small budget because their educational materials have had a much greater reach than they expected. Five institutions stated that the protection was significant in terms of networking and collaborating with other institutions.

The approach in addressing MIL

In this increasingly digital and media-centric world, the importance of media and information literacy cannot be understated. Croatia is making significant steps in promoting media literacy across various educational domains and age groups. This section explores a diverse range of viewpoints and efforts of educators, experts, organisations, and public institutions as they work towards enhancing media literacy in the country.

Senior advisor at the Agency for Education (Agencija za odgoj i obrazovanje) **Marijana Češi** works on developing the curriculum for the Croatian language in elementary schools and high schools. She states that they had to incorporate new definitions into the curriculum, such as for the term 'text' when they stated that text is everything that includes the possibility of receiving visual, auditory text, and any other form. It means that text is a radio show and a movie and a video and a website and everything else.

"Media literacy is often viewed as something that is only a Croatian language teachers' job to incorporate into their subject, however, media literacy is a tool and source of aid in many subjects and shouldn't be limited to one subject. It is just as useful in chemistry class as in a language class" she says.

Vedrana Močnik, a Croatian language professor at Josip Slavenski high school in the small town of Čakovec says that since she became a professor, she has seen a lot of improvement in the school system, such as the addition of the “culture and media” segment to the curriculum of Croatian language.

“But it only takes up 10% of the whole subject material and only 1 grade per semester which cannot be nearly enough.” She uses real-life examples to teach the students about media.

Assistant professor at the Faculty of Political Science Zagreb, **Petra Kovačević**, works with future journalists who chose television journalism as their specialisation. She says that *“People think media literacy is an essential part of all courses in the journalism study program because it includes understanding journalistic media processes, critical reflection, etc. but, the students are still not skilled enough in media literacy even though they might be already creating media content, from my experience.”* In her class, students make short explainer videos about journalism and media terms which are then uploaded to YouTube and often used by elementary schools, but the way they make them has changed greatly.

Robert Tomljenović, Deputy President of the Agency for Electronic Media, said it has been almost ten years since they started working on media literacy programs and projects, and they have encouraged many other higher education institutions to get involved.

“The Agency started working on media literacy projects methodically around 2014. This coincides with the established memorandum of cooperation with UNICEF, where we initially started working on the protection of minors in electronic media. Later on, it grew into a major media literacy project because we realised that in this new media and communication world, with the rapid development of technology, regulations alone cannot protect children and young people, especially since the most dangerous things, their development, and the spread of misinformation and manipulation, still occur on platforms that are not subject to regulations and are more powerful than social networks.”

Communication Associate (Multimedia) at UNICEF, **Marina Knežević Barišić**, states that the hardest part of elevating media literacy in Croatia was raising awareness amongst citizens, primarily parents, educators, and teachers, about the importance of media literacy. UNICEF has worked alongside the Agency for Electronic Media for years, and in 2016 they launched the *medijskapismenost.hr*² portal intended to inform and educate parents, child guardians and teachers about media literacy. This is the single most important internet platform for media literacy education in Croatia.

Ana Dokler, a graduate journalist, chief editor of the portal *medijskapismenost.hr*, and coordinator of the project 'Media Literacy Days' highlighted the need to dedicate more space to media education in the Croatian education system, starting from preschool but she also stated that the excessive number of mandatory subjects is a serious obstacle in both primary and secondary school. The portal has been active for 7 years, and the plan is for it to remain active and continuously publish content. As people have become involved and continue to be engaged, striving to improve media literacy from year to year, their additional efforts have decreased. There should be more long-term projects and fewer projects done solely for research purposes, like EDU media tests.

Maja Fistrić, corporate communications and CSR expert at A1 Croatia says that they have been collaborating with the Center for Missing and Abused Children and Center for Safer Internet. Together, they work on education for children, adults, parents, and the general public, including their employees. A1 started with Safer Internet Day and then continued with other activities; Safenet.com, Cyber Security Month. They launched the platform Better Online intending to use it to demonstrate to and educate the public, and they have focused on four themes: general security (malware, bots, deep fakes as well as new technologies, and AI), cyberbullying, excessive use of small screens, and the acceptance of fake news without questioning. In the future, they plan to expand existing topics with other subjects.

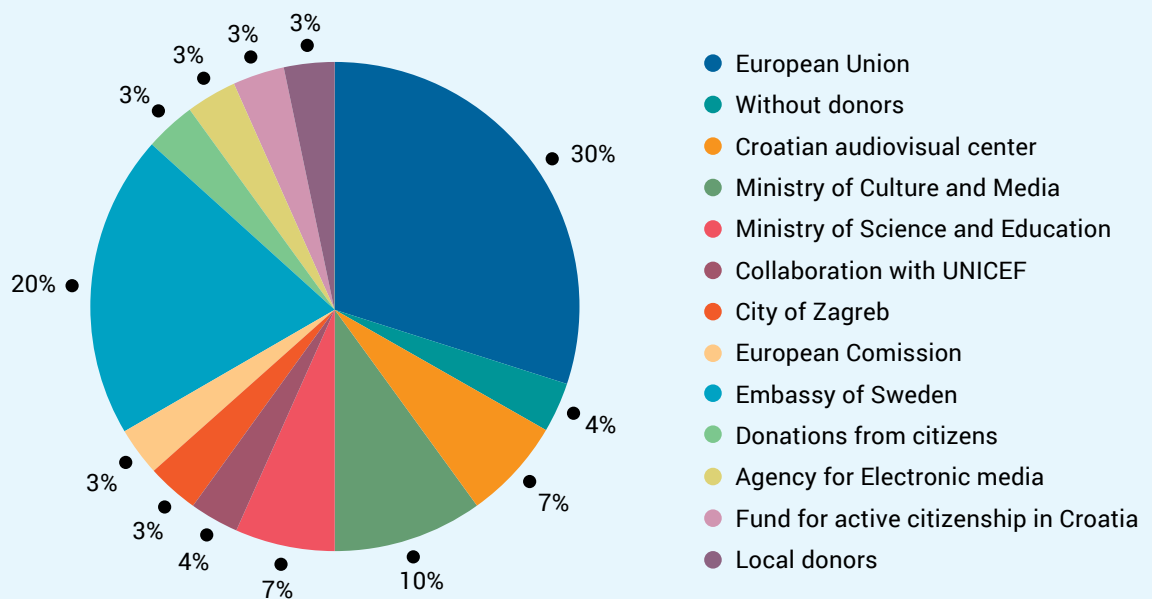
Ira Tuzlančić, a coordinator of a project for senior citizens in the organisation of Knjižnice grada Zagreba where they become e-Citizens with the help of the library (educating citizens about the electronic services of the e-Citizens system provided by public authorities) and the Information Literacy Hour program as one of the programs of the 65 plus project, which places special emphasis on free IT and information literacy for the elderly. This is the only project in this research whose beneficiaries are senior citizens.

Tajana Broz is a program coordinator at Faktograf.hr, the first Croatian media specializing in fact-checking. They have a way of communicating with their audience through the column "You asked". She explains how it works: "...in this column, we continuously invite our readers to contact us with questions about media or social media content which they suspect is disinformation, or they are not sure if they can understand it." And then Faktograf's journalistic team deals with some of these topics and responds through fact-checked articles. In this way, Tajana says, they improve their audiences' media literacy because they can see the fact-checking methodology through the text. Each of their texts has complete and clear sources stated for the claims they make when fact-checking.

Main donors supporting MIL in Croatia

In the field of media and information literacy in Croatia, the progress and success of numerous initiatives have been made possible through the support and contributions of main donors. These organisations and institutions play a vital role in empowering projects and programs that promote critical thinking and responsible media consumption among citizens of all ages. Their commitment to advancing MIL underscores the importance of fostering a well-informed and media literate society in the modern digital world.

Who are the main donors who have supported you when it comes to media and information literacy?



Best practices on MIL

In Croatia, efforts to promote MIL are actively being worked on by main donors and stakeholders. Organisations like A1 Croatia, the Center for Missing and Abused Children, and the Center for Safer Internet have launched successful campaigns and collaborations to enhance MIL across various age groups. Additionally, initiatives such as Media Literacy Days and the medijskapismenost.hr portal have witnessed increasing interest, reflecting a growing awareness of the importance of media education in the digital world.

An important thing is for the stakeholders to become aware of their position in working on media literacy, which is something A1 Croatia has done and created multiple successful campaigns. Fistrić says that, as internet service providers, they have the responsibility in an online world. At A1, they recognised it as a niche they are already working on.

"All telecommunications operators, through their activities, have to be concerned about [their] responsibility in the online world. As internet service providers, I believe that we might even have a slight advantage compared to some other institutions that cannot reach a large audience as an Internet provider can" she says. A very important thing is recognising the target audience, their habits, and the issues to be tackled as well as working with professionals in the field. A1 has been collaborating with the Center for Missing and Abused Children and the Center for Safer Internet. The same goes for HAVC, which conducts surveys and according to the results, works on implementing film literacy in all stages of education, starting with funding projects and organising extracurricular activities in schools which was very successful in 2023.

Respondents were asked to name other organisations that operate in the field of media and literacy. The most common responses included the Agency for Electronic Media and the portal *medijskapismenost.hr*, GONG and Association for Communication and Media Culture. Others mentioned were Pragma, Telecenter, Hrvatski filmski savez (HFS), Faculty of Political Science of Zagreb University, Croatian Studies (Hrvatski studiji), UNICEF, ChildHub - Child Protection Hub (Hrabri telefon), Ministry of education, Croatian Press Association (Hrvatsko novinarsko društvo), RODA, Alternator, Info Zone (Info Zona), Youth Network of Croatia (Mreža mladih Hrvatske) and a few more. Those mentioned are public bodies, NGOs, and educational institutions.

Some of the projects conducted in the last three years include the #Boljonline campaign by A1, 65 plus by Libraries of Zagreb City, Media Literacy Days (Dani medijske pismenosti) by the Agency for Electronic Media and UNICEF, *digitalna.hr* by Telecenter, FROOOM! by Bacači sjenki, Media education is important.MOV (Medijsko obrazovanje je važno.MOV), online hate speech reporting platform Seksizam naš svagdašnji, Fažana Media Fest by Investigative Journalism Center, TeamLit by Association for Communication and Media Culture, and many more. Alongside projects, respondents stated other important actions taken as a part of the everyday curriculum, in the faculty of political science and Josip Slavenski high school, or in creating the curriculum as stated by the Agency for Education.

Something all educators found and agree on is that people learn better when presented with real-life examples and a chance to learn through practice.

Močnik, a professor at a high school says that in her experience, it has proven to be best to let the students choose examples from the media they use and analyse those.

Ira Tuzlančić says that working on digital literacy with senior citizens requires the same approach. *“Adaptation to specific user needs helps the user feel comfortable and acquire new skills and knowledge in a safe and accepted environment without fear of any form of judgment (due to, for example, slow learning). It has been shown that individual workshops (one user, one volunteer/lecturer/workshop leader) are the best way to acquire new digital and informational skills among the elderly.”* When it comes to working with senior citizens, she also states that their prior knowledge is greater compared to participants from about ten years ago.

Knežević Barišić says that every year, UNICEF conducts an omnibus survey about how many citizens had the opportunity to learn about media literacy and this number has grown significantly through the years. They also use EduMediaTest, EU Kids online and this year *“In search of a measure between the school playground and TikTok”* of the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb. Their research show that students like the workshop type of teaching in which they learn in a different way than usual in school through experience, research, movement, and conversation.

The above-mentioned survey is conducted in collaboration with the *medijskapismenost.hr* portal, whose editor Ana Dokler says that the results show that the number of people who had the opportunity to learn about media literacy is bigger each year. Besides this, every year, during Media Literacy Days, the Agency for Electronic Media and UNICEF conduct research on media literacy and habits in collaboration with Ipsos agency. Since 2018, they surveyed a representative sample of a thousand citizens from all over Croatia, spanning different age groups. The questionnaire includes five questions, where respondents rate their own media literacy skills on a scale from one to five.

“In the first year, the average grade was around 2.8, then it slightly increased. We also asked if they had the opportunity to learn about critical thinking skills regarding media content because the results in the first years were quite poor, for example 11% of citizens said they had that opportunity. And among them, the majority were younger people. This year, when we asked the same question about the opportunity to learn about media literacy skills, explaining all these skills related to access, analysis, and content creation, there was a much larger number of people who said they had the opportunity. Again, among them, the majority were young people. We interpret this as a positive sign that projects like Media Literacy Days or Safer Internet Day, where, within those events, at least once a school year, workshops or lectures on those

topics are conducted, and it may be effective” she says. When it comes to Media Literacy days, Ana Dokler says it is great to hear that in smaller places where she has never heard of anything happening in schools, people organise things themselves for their own collaborations. Every year, the portal invites kindergartens, schools, libraries, associations, cinemas, faculties, and other institutions to participate and they organise lectures, workshops, film screenings, round tables, and more. That is the main point of the project, and perhaps the most important, she says.

Tomljenović says that Agency for Electronic Media's portal *medijskapismenost.hr*, offers 30 educational brochures and 20 video lessons. The growing interest and necessity is evident in the fact that in four years, the materials have been downloaded over a million times.

“I believe this is an incredible number for Croatia, but it is a targeted portal intended for teachers, educators, and, to some extent, parents who also download the materials. These million downloads speaks of our success and confirms the interest, but more importantly, it reflects the need of teachers and educators for support in implementing media education in kindergarten, elementary and high schools” he says. The portal offers educational materials that are part of the largest media literacy project in Croatia, called “Media Literacy Days”. This year, they had more than 600 events in 185 cities and towns in Croatia, with 1,500 activities and over 35,000 participants.

Kanižaj says that at the faculty of political science, there are subjects that teach new storytelling, adapted to new generations and new ways of approaching audiences.

Kovačević says that since FPZG students have been making media literacy explainer videos for years now, it is visible how the way they make them has changed. Nowadays, students tend to create shorter videos, with more graphic visuals and those videos are often used by elementary school teachers who show them to even younger students. *“Most teachers must have realised that kids learn better when knowledge is presented to them visually and in a way more similar to media content they consume on a daily basis”, she said.*

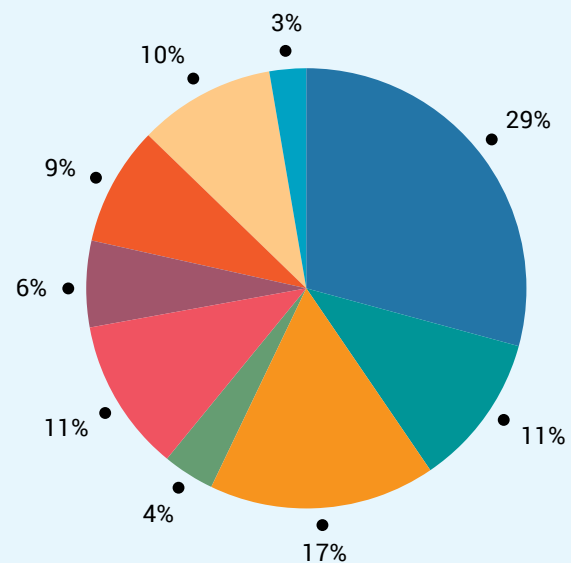
Bičanić from NGO Blank, says: *“The world is becoming more and more visual and less reliant on the written word. People used to be afraid of television and the internet, but now there's an even bigger boom, so let's prepare generations for it, let's educate them, let's minimise the harmful effects of media, maximise the quality, train people who will consume it on a daily basis because then life will be better quality.”*

Needs assessment: What are we lacking?

The stakeholders who have conducted media and information literacy projects and have dealt with those issues are those who can best assess the needs and failings in the field. Through disseminations of multiple projects of different kinds, stakeholders have gone through different obstacles which let them define the areas that should be addressed more in future actions.

Which aspects of MIL need to be addressed in future actions?

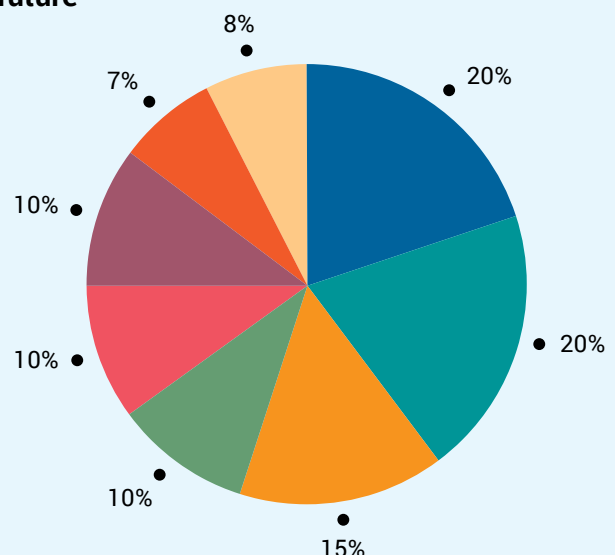
- Media literacy
- News literacy
- Digital literacy
- Library literacy
- General literacy
- Cultural literacy
- ITC /Internet security
- Information literacy
- Film literacy



When asked what aspects of MIL need to be addressed in future actions, respondents were asked to pick at least three of the most important ones. Most answers pointed at media literacy (23.29%), followed by digital literacy (13.6%) and news and general literacy with 11% each.

Types of actions to be used to address MIL literacy in the future

- Networking
- Trainings/trainings
- Community involvement
- Campaigns
- Securing finances
- Research
- Resources
- Advocacy



Networking and training were recognised the most (20% of responses), i.e., the most advocated actions in terms of future actions. Community involvement was stated as important by 15% of respondents. Organising campaigns, securing finances and research got 10% each. Resources and advocacy got the least answers, each 7.5%.

Media literacy and digital literacy were the two categories recognised by respondents as most important for future action. It shows that stakeholders see the need to increase media and digital literacy. In a world that is more and more digital, it is encouraging to see important stakeholders recognising the need to increase citizens' literacy in digital areas. The next two categories include news literacy and general literacy. This is to be done by networking and training, according to the respondents. Those two approaches were those emphasised by stakeholders in the interviews, claiming that Croatia lacked purposeful training for educators and recipients.

Saša Leković, the President of Investigative Journalism Center in Croatia and freelance reporter, editor, trainer, and media consultant started a journalism festival (Fažana Media Fest) that offered media literacy workshops in 2019 in which the program was adapted for people who are not experts but who he wanted to involve in the festival. The festival was developed in collaboration with MDI⁷ from London and SEENPM⁸.

"When I was pursuing an international license for investigative journalism, there was a one-year program where we visited the Danish School of Journalism in Denmark, where top journalists and theorists taught students, but also "ordinary" people who came to learn about how the media works. I remember a young train station manager who came because he wanted to understand how the media functions and he wanted to become media literate. Moreover, since it was Denmark and not Croatia, the state subsidised it (and this was 15 years ago)." Leković believes that this should exist in Croatia as well, but for many reasons, it doesn't.

Overall, 10% of responders stated that research is important in future actions, while some interviewees particularly highlighted its value.

Prof. Dr. sc. and vice president of the Society for Communication and Media Culture, **Igor Kanižaj** says that research is the most important part of any media literacy action. In DKMK⁹ they conduct research based on all audiences, from preschool children to seniors. He states that media literacy is one of the few areas where there is such a large consensus and so much evidence-based findings for why media literacy is important. Rarely is any other topic so "one-way", that is, it is clear to everyone from parents to educators that it should be taught as much as possible.

⁷ Media Diversity Institute

⁸ South East European Network for Professionalization of Media

⁹ Društvo za komunikacijsku i medijsku kulturu (Society for Communication and Media Culture)

Investment and Support from Government

Marijana Češi states that there are a few problems with developing the school curriculum and incorporating media literacy, the biggest one of which is **the lack of professional help**. She states that there is a **lack of public tenders** for help in this area and since media is always evolving, there should be more thought put into the fact that experts' opinions are crucial. She also states that politics often dictates the process in a way that doesn't allow professionals to do their job as thoroughly as they believe is necessary. *"The area of media that changes and develops every day, where non-stop new research is new knowledge because it is connected with the development of technology, I really think that there should be an expert in that area involved in the creation of the curriculum document"*, she says. She mentions expertise and good collaboration of her institution with Društvo za komunikacijsku i medijsku kulturu (Society for Communication and Media Culture).

Igor Kanižaj says: *"...too little is invested in MIL – the biggest problem is that professionals have to sensitise leaders on why media literacy is important. Most of them speak up when problems arise, e.g., cyberbullying, and then politicians start to recognise the problem and act towards improvement."*

Another important point is the need for education on both sides, both media content creators and receivers. Leković says: *"You can be an excellent journalist, but if someone who receives the information you send cannot analyse or place it into context, it's like pouring water into an empty vessel: It's pointless."* This is how you get the opposite effect, resulting in fake news, rumours, misinformation etc, he adds.

Tajana Broz agrees, she says that is why we have media and that it should be credible and work according to certain standards that will provide people with information that they can trust. She states that the point of media literacy means not only understanding how to reflect on information obtained from the media, but also understanding the process behind it and how it is created.

MIL in (Early) Education

All interviewed professionals working in the field of education agree that media literacy education should be implemented in the education system since early childhood, in a form of a more defined and systematic cross-subject topic or a specific elective course. Vedrana Močnik and Petra Kovačević also stated that there should be more educational opportunities for teachers.

Robert Tomljenović stated that even the Agency for Electronic Media is still operating within a niche community. The numbers indicate a high level of interest, but he thinks they have more work to do to broaden their reach.

“There is still not enough awareness among media organisations about the importance of media literacy, except for the social responsibility aspect. From their perspective, they should also consider that it is a way to develop new audiences.”

Cooperation and synergies between stakeholders

Ingrid Padjen Đurić states that what is crucial is cooperation between non-institutional and institutional educational activities to make a change. In general, as prof. Kanižaj explains, there are many activities taking place in Croatia that the general public does not benefit from because they do not know about them.

Petra Kovačević mentions that media literacy is a buzzword and there is always somebody researching it or talking about it, but it is not a systematic approach and progress rarely has any real visible influence in media literacy improvement. Saša Leković also agrees that he hasn't seen the effects of some of the research he has heard of or taken part in. Igor Kanižaj says that only recently has research started to be used systematically, The National Program for Youth (Nacionalni program za mlade) is one of the first strategies that directly uses research created in Croatia on media literacy. He highlights that the most important thing is that the representatives of the academic community are present in the bodies that make the curricula and educational decisions in the government.

Discussion

The biggest challenge in media literacy in Croatia seems to be conducting projects and activities systematically. Since there are not enough media professionals in the field of media collaborating as consultants for government policies, according to our respondents, those policies are not sufficient. The professors and educators do not have the space in the course or the ability to teach kids/students in a way that would be sufficient for newer generations due to the lack of funding, systematic education for educators, and overall small recognition of the importance of media literacy. All those factors contribute to the fact that when it comes to education, kids often depend on the knowledge and MIL awareness of

their specific Croatian language teacher. But without the right education for teachers, the gap between the younger audience's media habits and the ones of their professors creates a big disbalance. In many areas of media and information literacy, professional individuals are active in multiple areas at once, such as in faculties, NGOs, collaborations with public institutions, informal workshops, and centres of excellence and so on.

The basis for any policy or curriculum should be scientific research, and the respondents mentioned the lack of specific usage of research. There seems to be lack of recognition for research deficiency, because when asked about the best actions to be taken in the future, only 10% of the responses were connected to research. Most of the respondents do not use quantitative or qualitative tools for assessing the media literacy of their recipients, or the efficiency of their projects, which could be a way to evaluate and improve projects. Therefore, what happens is that resources are not available because the government is not aware of the importance of MIL which is why professionals are not consulted and consequently teachers are not educated sufficiently to teach about media literacy to the ever-changing young audience. All responders agree that media literacy should be taught starting from kindergarten. This was stated by public institutions, consultants, teachers, and researchers. On the informal education side, numerous NGOs have recognised the importance of MIL and conducted very important and successful projects on developing media literacy, but the general public does not benefit from them because they do not know about them, as they are not promoted enough. On the other hand, when events are open to the public, people often fail to recognise their importance and do not attend.

In these research, we have learned that there are projects covering almost all areas of media literacy for all ages. Most of them are longer than 6 months or they are part of regular activities of an organisation/institution and all of them are conducted and carried out by professionals in the field. The important thing to note is that all professionals who took part in this research are very passionate and care deeply about MIL and have a big enthusiasm about how it will develop in the future. Even though almost all of them state that the lack of government awareness or funding can affect the direction and development of MIL, all of them have seen great improvement in all areas of MIL and agree that it will keep improving.

Conclusions

According to in-depth interviews with experts in their field and quantitative analysis, we conclude that the area of MIL in Croatia has potential, but that it lacks key improvements that would prevent generations of media and information illiterate individuals. From an early kindergarten education to encouraging lifelong learning through different forms of education, MIL will have to become the norm since the world we live in is rapidly developing technologically.

It is the job of professionals in the MIL field to prepare future generations for the world we live in, not the world that existed when the education system was designed, and it is up to the government to provide a suitable space where they can perform at a professional level. Moreover, professionals in the field of media are not present enough in forming government and education policies. Therefore, it is crucial to include them at all stages of these processes, as insufficient involvement of media professionals as consultants for government policies can result in inadequate policies.

In a world where traditional 'gatekeeping' of media content is less possible, it is essential to teach children how to evaluate content for themselves because the digital world does more than just combine modes of communication; it also merges them. The lack of scientific research as a basis for policies and curricula is evident, with little emphasis on using research to assess and improve media literacy projects.

Although we are going with the assumption that the vast majority lacks knowledge about MIL, we should test as many people as possible through some kind of online test, as conducted by UNICEF and AEM 'Edu Media test' and see real numbers. Such tests should also become regular.

Furthermore, NGOs in collaboration with some GOVs have been successfully conducting Media Literacy Days for many years, creating a portal completely dedicated to MIL, and organising various workshops and research, but what should be applied to all this is long-term sustainability. This is important so that research is not done just for the sake of research, that workshops are not organised when something is popular, that funds are not given only when something is 'in', but that continuous work is carried out.

The solution recognised by Ana Dokler is the National Center for Information and Media Literacy: an organisation/institution that systematically takes care of MIL, just like CLEMI in France, which dates back to 1983, and was founded to train teachers to build children's citizenship skills by providing tools and fostering their critical thinking of media and information.

Despite the challenges, there are positive developments in media literacy, with various professionals and organisations actively involved in conducting short and long-term projects and activities across different age groups.



Recommendations

By implementing these approaches, individuals can develop critical thinking skills and become more critical media consumers, as well as make better use of complex information in today's digital age:

CURRICULUM INTEGRATION

Government institutions and education professionals should integrate media and information literacy into the formal education curriculum across different subjects. Teach students critical thinking, fact-checking, and engaging responsibly in the digital space.

TEACHER TRAINING

Educators and scholars in the fields of MIL should work on providing training and professional development opportunities for teachers to enhance their own media literacy skills and effectively incorporate MIL into their teaching methods.

NATIONAL CENTRE FOR INFORMATION AND MEDIA LITERACY

One organisation or institution that systematically works on media literacy, deals with teacher training and the development of education materials and tools for the media literacy development of children and youth. It should also provide support for children's media creativity in schools, as well as projects that connect teachers and media professionals.

DIGITAL LITERACY PROGRAMS

Institutions working in the digital field should collaborate with media professionals and develop programs that focus on internet safety, responsible use of technology, and the evaluation of online information.

ACTIVE-LEARNING

Teachers and educators should engage students in hands-on projects that involve creating media content and encourage them to be responsible content creators.

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

Regularly assess the effectiveness of media literacy programs to identify areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments (this includes for example self-assessment tests on media literacy that will be regularly conducted, especially before and after a training or education session).

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Annexes

LIST OF INSTITUTIONS WHO Completed THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The institutions who answered includes: UNICEF Office for Croatia, Center for Civic Initiatives Poreč (platform Seksizam naš svagdašnji) (Centar za građanske inicijative Poreč), A1 Croatia, Lupiga.com, Telecentar, Info zona, Libraries of Zagreb City (Knjižnice grada Zagreba), Childrens creative center DOKKICA (Dječji kreativni centar DOKKICA), Bacači sjenki association (Udruga Bacači sjenki), GONG, Pragma, Josip Slavenski High School in Čakovec (Gimnazija Josipa Slavenskog Čakovec), Investigative journalism center (Centar za istraživačko novinarstvo), Croatian Audiovisual Center (Hrvatski audiovizualni centar), Agency for education (Agencija za odgoj i obrazovanje), Međimurske novine, Blank_filmski inkubator, Faktograf, Faculty of political science of Zagreb University (Fakultet političkih znanosti) (2 responses), Agency for electronic media (Agencija za elektroničke medije), Nova TV, medijskapismenost.hr, Association for Communication and Media Culture (Društvo za medijsku komunikaciju i kulturu).



Media and information literacy in Serbia

Research on the needs and existing practices

Executive summary

Media and information literacy is an essential skill in a democratic society of the 21st century. A large number of media content that reaches people on a daily basis requires at least a basic knowledge of media and information literacy (MIL) so that citizens can distinguish between accurate and inaccurate information, propaganda, mis/dis/mal-information and manipulation of other kinds. The research findings indicate that media and information literacy needs to be introduced from the earliest age, already in preschool education. Findings also point out the need for change in the educational system, which is outdated and non-innovative.

The methodology used in the research was aimed at mapping out the existing initiatives, good practices, key stakeholders as well as identifying the challenges and the needs of media and information literacy in Serbia. These research reports provide an overview of the MIL situation in Serbia over the last three years (2020 – 2023). This period was chosen in light of the spread of mis/dis/mal-information, the ‘infodemic’ period, the current development of technology, especially of artificial intelligence (AI) and the dangers they carry, as well as the increased interest of donors in supporting MIL initiatives.

The report will describe the current state of MIL in Serbia with a focus on a brief analysis of national strategies, programmes and policies related to the promotion of MIL, map out the initiatives/projects that have been implemented or are still ongoing in formal and non-formal education and assess the development of MIL in these two educational approaches.

The purpose of this research is to examine the current state of MIL in Serbia.

The goals of the research are:

- To analyse the current state of MIL in each of the Serbia with a focus on national strategies and policies for the improvement of MIL;
- To identify key actors working in the field of MIL at the level of formal and informal education;
- To identify best practices and assess local MIL-related needs.

In this research, a mixed methods approach was applied, with triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data. More precisely, researchers conducted desk research (of MIL-related laws, policies, and strategies), questionnaire-based analysis (to identify relevant key actors and initiatives) and in-depth interviews (to assess challenges and needs in the country concerning media and information literacy in formal and non-formal education).

The purpose of the literature review and desk analysis was to inspect the existing legal, political, and strategic framework of the country when it comes to MIL. Identification and review of relevant literature, including national strategies, programmes, or policies, contributes to a thorough understanding of MIL, priority areas and existing needs that are or should be addressed.

The research was conducted in May, June, and July 2023 in Serbia.

Literature review

The media are important in our lives because they influence our behaviour, appearance, but also determine pre-existing attitudes, and shape opinions. The media content that reaches us every day can influence all of the above, and for this very reason MIL is important so that we can approach such content critically, and ultimately, consume all the media content that reaches us in a healthy way.

“Media and information literacy is one of the basic competencies of all citizens, and in the process of media literacy, special attention is devoted to developing the ability to think critically, i.e., the ability to intercept information obtained from the media with key questions, which would determine the meaning, intention and effect of the information they encounter. Considering the fact that the media are present in the lives of all citizens, already from the youngest age, media literacy can be considered a competence that needs to be developed and acquired through all levels of formal education” (The bell rings for media literacy (Zvoni za medijsku pismenost), group of authors, 2021: 7).

Many non-governmental, governmental, and other civil society organisations in Serbia and in the entire world are engaged in creating MIL handbooks in order to help citizens, primarily teachers, professors, and students, in acquiring and disseminating MIL skills, bringing media literacy examples and best practices in this field closer to them. Among them is the Novi Sad School of Journalism, as well as the Learn and Discern programme of the organisation IREX in Serbia, the journalist associations NUNS, UNS and NDNV¹, but also Propulsion, FakeNews Tracker, Centar E8, Media Diversity Institute Western Balkans and other non-governmental organisations. Apart from media organisations, the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications is also involved in this process. In 2022, the Propulsion Fund, in cooperation with the then Ministry of Culture and Information of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, created one of the first media and information literacy handbooks intended for parents.

Media and information literacy (MIL) received a vital boost during the UNESCO General Conference in 2019, when 193 countries, including Serbia², proclaimed the Global Media and Information Literacy Week.

The media literacy index is at a very low level in Serbia, as well as in other countries in the region. According to the latest data from 2022, published

¹ Full names of journalist associations: NUNS (Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia), UNS (Association of Journalists of Serbia) and NDNV (Independent Association of Journalists of Vojvodina).

² Serbia is among the 193 countries that proclaimed the Global Media and Information Literacy Week. You can read more about it [here](#), accessed on June 3rd, 2023.

by the Open Society Foundation from Sofia, Serbia is close to the bottom of the list of European countries, in 32nd place out of 41 countries included in the research. As stated in the aforementioned research, “these countries have a low potential to deal with the effects of fake news and disinformation, mainly due to poor performance in media freedoms and education”³.

In accordance with the curriculum for mother tongue and civic education classes, students are expected to familiarise themselves with the media and media genres. As stated on the website of the Novi Sad School of Journalism, since 2005, media literacy has appeared in the curriculum in three teaching units within civic education and mother tongue. “The media strategy of the Republic of Serbia for 2016 recognises the importance of media literacy as a necessity that we as a society must start dealing with, because so far we have not, at least not to a sufficient extent. The results of the latest research on the media literacy of Serbian citizens indicate that, despite the initiative to study the media within the teaching units of the mother tongue and civic education, the citizens of Serbia still lack sufficient media literacy.”⁴

The introduction of media literacy in primary and secondary schools is envisaged in the Strategy for the Development of the Public Information System in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2020 to 2025 through measure 5.1, which implies the continuation of “the process of introducing media literacy into the formal education system, as well as the development of the competences of teachers and professors”, and the competences and outcomes that media literacy supposes, can also be found in three laws in the field of education (the Law on the Basics of the Education and Training System, the Law on Primary Education and Upbringing, and the Law on Secondary Education and Upbringing) (Sigeti, 2021: 8).

When it comes to other documents, the Government of the Republic of Serbia recognised the importance of media education for young people. This is shown in the strategic documents (Media Strategy 2020-2025⁵ and Education Development Strategy until 2030⁶). In addition to the government and civil society organisations which have already been mentioned in this research, independent organisations, in collaboration with public institutions (for example, public bids by the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Information and Telecommunications), are implementing projects related to media and information literacy. These projects typically involve educational professionals, journalists, journalism, and communication students, as well as primary and secondary school students, depending on the specific projects.

³ You can find more information about this research here, accessed on May 30th, 2023.

⁴ More details: [Media literacy – Novi Sad school of journalism \(novinarska-skola.org.rs\)](https://novinarska-skola.org.rs), accessed on June 3rd, 2023.

⁵ [Media strategy](#), accessed on June 3rd, 2023.

⁶ [Education development strategy until 2030](#), accessed on June 3rd, 2023.

Educational reforms put in place in the school year 2018/2019 introduced the programme “Language, media and culture” as a compulsory elective subject⁷ for high school students in grammar schools. The subject can be elected in the first and second year. The goal of the elective programme “Language, media and culture” is to contribute to the improvement of communication skills, the development of media culture and the adoption of cultural patterns that will enable the student to navigate in the modern world, build an identity and stimulate further professional development. According to the course syllabus, upon completion of the programme, the student will be able to: „critically examine the positive and negative impact of the media, assess the importance and influence of information and sources of information and connect them with his/her own experience in order to solve different situations, recognise examples of manipulation, discrimination and hate speech in the media and have a critical attitude towards them, take a responsible attitude towards the creation of his/her own media messages, communicate in a constructive way, express his/her willingness to participate in actions aimed at improving media culture and distinguish cultural from popular content, and make value judgments based on this”⁸.

According to the research of the Novi Sad School of Journalism, the lack of systematic organisation of planned education, conduction of research and creation of educational literature is considered to be the biggest shortcoming. “This state of affairs can be considered a consequence of the dispersiveness of actors who implement such programmes without a common consensus on specific needs, knowledge levels of different target groups and adequate modalities of educational activities that correspond to different ages and professions.” (The bell rings for media literacy (Zvoni za medijsku pismenost), group of authors, 2021: 10).

Thanks to numerous projects, the Novi Sad School of Journalism has distinguished itself as a pioneer and bearer of this topic in Serbia. Sigeti and Janjatović Jovanović from this organisation conducted research on media literacy at faculties where teachers are educated. There were 41 faculties analysed in this research. In their concluding discussion, the authors stated that the challenge of implementing MIL in primary and secondary education lies in the fact that the best form of implementation, which refers to the implementation of lessons from already existing subjects, cannot be made compulsory, nor can instructions be given to professors on how to do it. “Teacher’s books and model lessons can

⁷ With the reform of high schools that began in the school year 2018/19, new elective but compulsory programmes were introduced. Students were supposed to choose one of the six offered. Apart from the subjects Individual, Group and Society, Health and Sport, Education for Sustainable Development, Applied Sciences, Art and Design, students also had the opportunity to choose a subject dedicated to media literacy – Language, media and culture.

⁸ A detailed overview of the syllabus for the course “Language, Media and Culture” is available [here](#), accessed on June 3rd, 2023.

serve as an auxiliary tool and a transitional solution, however, the ultimate goal that should be pursued is the synthesis of knowledge in the creative analysis and production of media messages." Therefore, the continuous education of teachers should be pointed out as one of the possible solutions, whereby the first step is most certainly university education (Sigeti, Janjatović Jovanović, 2023: 33).

In her PhD dissertation, Violeta Kecman dealt with media literacy and critical thinking. As the main conclusions, she points out that proper upbringing and education (institutional and non-institutional) is necessary for students, as well as greater involvement of responsible educational institutions in the field of teacher training. Furthermore, Kecman stresses that it is important to create an appropriate teacher's book, which would include suggestions for the implementation of certain teaching content, teaching preparations for the lesson, work materials for students, evaluation instruments, which would above all help teachers to develop awareness of the importance and possibilities of teaching aimed at developing media literacy. "At the same time, a significant role in the development of media literacy can be provided per schools, by promoting media literacy ideas and by supporting students to creatively use the media in [the] classroom, technically equipping classrooms for teaching media literacy with computers and the Internet, regulating the use of devices (such as smartphones) in school space" (Kecman, 2020: 243).

Research methodology

In order to meet the results of this research, the research methodology included a mixed methods approach, that is, the application of quantitative and qualitative research methods. The research questionnaire was forwarded to the civil sector, public authorities, formal educational institutions, actors relevant to the education/training of teachers, online platforms dealing with MIL, media, academic communities, and libraries, in order to identify relevant key actors and initiatives dealing with the topic of MIL in Serbia. Researchers had previously mapped the key actors to fill in the questioners. Using the analysis based on the questionnaire, research obtained relevant data about which and what kind of projects were implemented or are being implemented, what actions are implemented within projects and what they see as the key measures and actions to improve MIL in the future.

The questionnaire was completely conducted online and forwarded to the relevant actors and institutions that had been mapped out previously for the purposes of this research. The questionnaire contained three sections: cooperation and joint actions in the field of media and information literacy (MIL), actions / projects related to media and information literacy (MIL), and media and information literacy needs.

When it comes to in-depth interviews, they primarily served to assess the challenges and needs in the country regarding MIL in formal and informal education, since the answers to these questions were given by relevant persons from the field of MIL in Serbia, who work in non-governmental organisations, institutions, in formal education, media associations, libraries and the media.



Results

The results of the research show that almost all institutions/organisations that were interviewed had projects related to MIL. The largest donors of such projects were the European Union, the US Embassy in Belgrade, and (at the time) the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Serbia and other organisations that allocate funds for projects concerning MIL. The type of project that has been implemented the most is the provision of resources, research, and networking platforms, which will be discussed in the continuation of this research. The direct beneficiaries of such projects are young people, teachers and students, and the projects are mostly implemented within the civil sector, formal educational institutions, public authorities, and the media industry. The research showed that MIL projects contribute the most to the development of media literacy skill, and within the media literacy skills, critical thinking is the skill that most projects aim to develop.

The interlocutors we spoke to emphasised that there are MIL projects, but they are often not sustainable, because after the end of the projects, communication with the beneficiaries is lost. Networking among the civil sector that works in the field of MIL, as well as more long-term projects could contribute to maintaining the meaningful communication and cooperation with people participating in projects. As an important component, all interlocutors pointed out the importance of involving beneficiaries, that is, engaging them in content production, as in that way they will learn but also contribute to educating the target groups they work with.

MIL situation in Serbia 2020 – 2023

Overall, 24 organisations / institutions responded to the questionnaire, namely: 2 responses from public authorities, 4 responses from formal educational institutions, 12 from civil society, 1 from online MIL platform, 3 from the media industry, 1 from the audio-visual industry and 2 from the library.

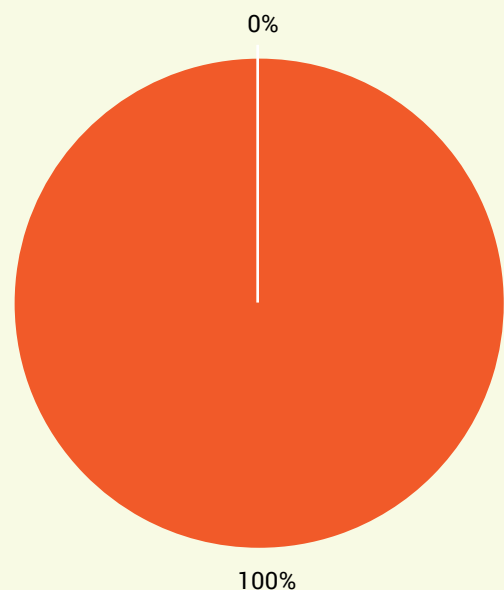
When it comes to the category of institutions, the most responses came from the civil sector (50%), followed by formal educational institutions (16.7%), media (12.5%), public authorities (8.3%). One response each was received from online platforms (4.2%), production companies (4.2%) and libraries (4.2%).

A national scope of action is noted in the case of institutions/organisations with 50% of the project being implemented on a national level. International projects followed with 20.8%, while 16.7% work at the regional level. At the district level, there are 12.5%, as well as at the local level (12.5%). Journalist associations work differently – NDNV works at the provincial, local, and national level, while the work of NUNS is put in at the national level, but they work actively in the region with partner organisations, as well as at the international level, since they are members of EFJ (European Federation of Journalists) and IJF (International Federation of Journalists). The library of the City of Belgrade also stood out – it carries out its activities on several levels. The primary level of action is local, but activities are also carried out in cooperation with other libraries and institutions in the country. When it comes to the media, City smart radio works at the local level, while the City smart media portal works at the national level.

During the last three years (2020-2023), have you taken any actions in the area of media and information literacy (MIL)?

- Yes
- No

Chart 1: All actors have taken some actions in the last three years in the area of media and information literacy (MIL)



Actions in the field of media literacy could be grouped into several domains: training, research, advocacy/representation, building resources and campaigns, securing funds and engaging citizens. The majority of these actions comprised trainings (62.5%), followed by research (16.7%), advocacy/representation (12.5%), resources (8.3%), followed by campaigns (4.2%), fundraising (4.2%) and engaging citizens (4.2%) with one answer each.

Main donors supporting MIL in Serbia

Who are the main donors who have supported you when it comes to media and information literacy (MIL)?

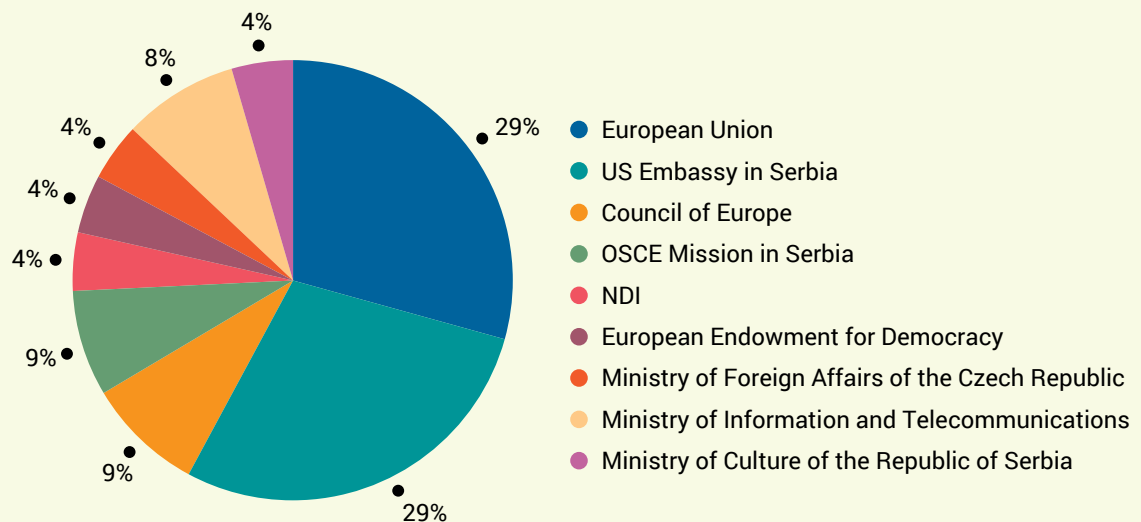


Chart 2: The largest donors in the field of media and information literacy in Serbia are the European Union and the US Embassy in Serbia

One of the tasks of the questionnaire was the identification of actors that the surveyed organisations, media, and institutions recognise as the most important participants in the process of media literacy. The most frequent answers were: Novi Sad School of Journalism, IREX, Raskrikavanje and KRIK, Istinomer, Fake News Tracker, Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia (NUNS), Media Diversity Institute Western Balkans, Ministry of Information and Telecommunications, Media and Reform Centre Niš and Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation. When it comes to the types of actions and activities, these refer mainly to the field of training, publications, and research.

Different types of projects were implemented in the period from 2020 to 2023. Among them there includes the *Media literacy hub* of the Niš Media and Reform Centre, the *Local Media and Young Journalists Fight against Covid-19 Disinformation* by NDNV, the *Initiative for New Media and Digital Literacy (New Literacy)* by Propulsion and the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications, the *Find out and Discern programme* of the IREX organisation in Serbia, *Fake News Exposed - Strengthening the capacity of journalists and election monitors in Serbia to confront disinformation and propaganda* by Istinomer, *FakeNews Tracker for a generation without disinformation* by FakeNews Tracker, *The Bell rings for the MIL – strengthening the learning of media and information literacy in the Serbian school system* by the Novi Sad School of Journalism, and others.

As many as 37.5% interviewed actors in the mentioned period, developed the *Resources* that includes TV and/or content published online, information leaflets, videos, audios, lesson plans, curriculum modules, websites, etc., related to media literacy. On the other hand, 16.75% opted for *Research* that includes significant qualitative or quantitative research on various aspects of media literacy, prepared and/or widely used by media literacy practitioners. Another 12.5% opted for *Network platforms* that includes conferences, seminars, meetings, online and offline forums, newsletters, and databases. Finally, 4.2% activities were focused on *Engaging citizens*, which implies local projects for empowering beneficiaries through face-to-face, telephone or online contact. It should be noted that Propulsion included all the mentioned activities in its programmes, while the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications combined two approaches – they worked on research that was conducted in 2020, then they created media content in 2021, while in 2022 they organised trainings/educations.

Who are the direct holders of the project?

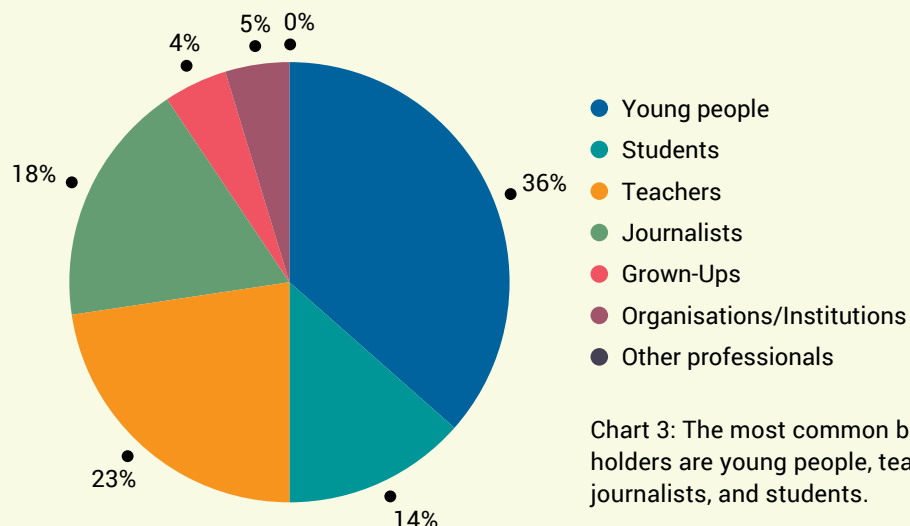
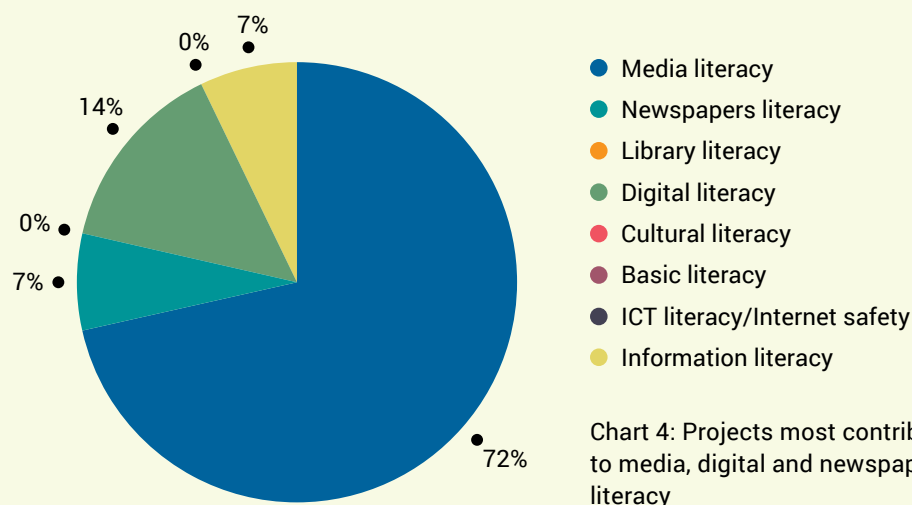


Chart 3: The most common beneficiary holders are young people, teachers, journalists, and students.

New Literacy programme was dedicated to a larger number of groups: young people, parents, and teachers, with influencers, i.e., creators on social networks, civil servants, and employees in the corporate sector, as well as with the general public through campaigns. Istinomer worked with election observers and journalists, and the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications worked with different target groups, such as parents, businessmen/entrepreneurs, and public administration officials.

Most projects related to MIL were implemented by the civil society – 50% of our interviewees have conducted MIL projects through civil society, followed by formal educational institutions (16.7%), public authorities, actors relevant for education/training of educators/for MIL courses, the media industry and academic and/or research communities (8.3% each). Fewer projects were implemented by the libraries and online MIL platforms (4.2%).

Which category of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) did this project contribute to?



The projects run by organisations and institutions contributed the most to strengthening media literacy (72%), digital literacy (14%), and finally news and information literacy (7%). None of the respondents mentioned the library, cultural literacy, ICT and basic literacy as the primary framework of action.

Critical thinking skills, i.e., understanding how the media industry works and how media messages are constructed, is the main MIL skill that was developed or is still being developed within the project (66.7%). Organisations/institutions mentioned in one answer each, the development of creative skills (4.2%), intercultural dialogue (4.2%), correct use of media (4.2%) and participation and engagement (4.2%). The last two answers refer to the correct use of media (4.2%), i.e., to the multi-skills of media and newspapers literacy (4.2%). One of the organisations/institutions worked on improving all the mentioned MIL skills (4,2%).

The majority of projects were implemented at the national level (62.5%), followed by local projects (16.7%), and international projects (8.3%). One project each was implemented at the district (4.2%) and regional levels (4.2%).

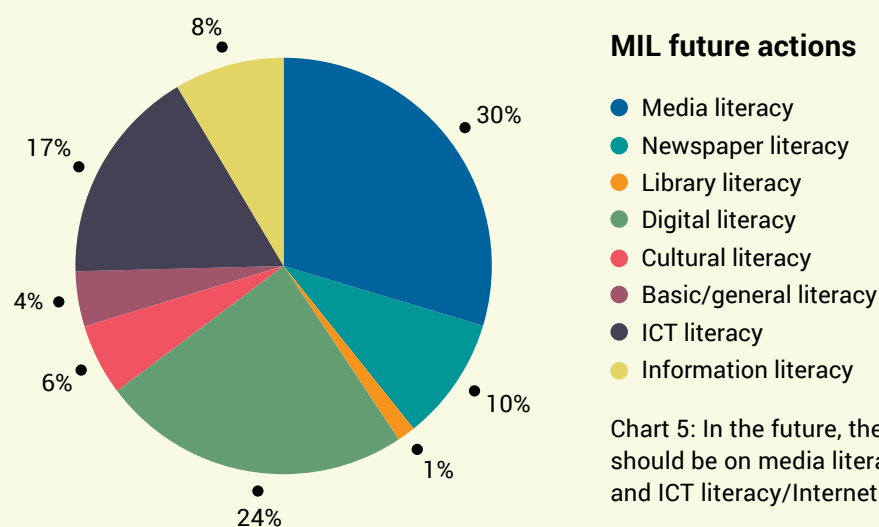
The average duration of the projects from the analysed organisations/institutions is slightly more than six months, 6.3 months to be exact, while 12.5% of interviewees said they had projects that lasted less than 6 months. Only one organisation (4.2%) had a project that lasted 48 months. In one organisation, the project lasts six years, but has several stages (4.2%). The short average duration of the projects is one of the major challenges – it is difficult to ensure the sustainability, continue the cooperation with engaged beneficiaries and ensure the long-lasting effects with a project duration of an average of 6.3 months.

When asked to mark the importance of MIL, 66.7% responders stated that MIL projects were extremely important, and 29.2% said they were important. Only 4.2% said that the implemented project was completely unimportant.

Needs assessment: What are we lacking?

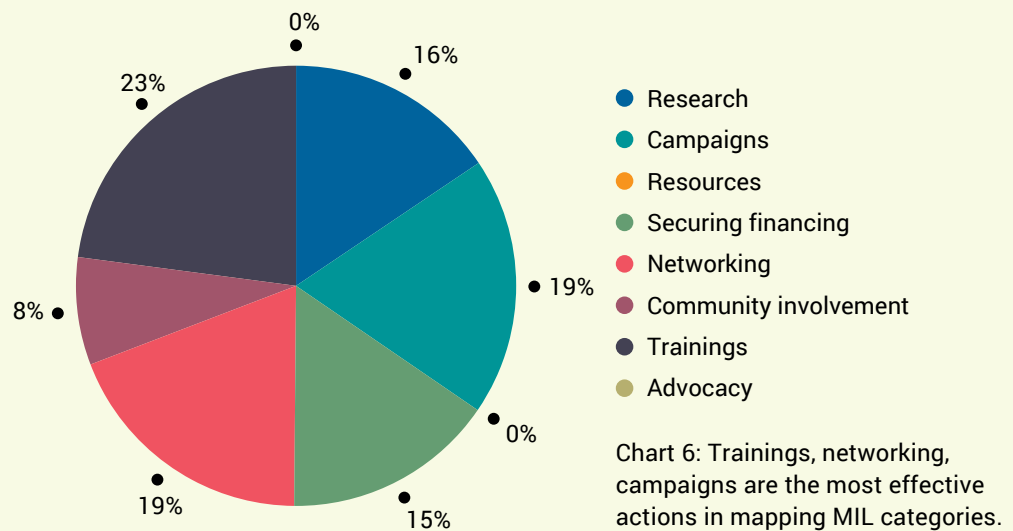
In order to assess the needs of media and information literacy in Serbia and what is missing, we dedicated one segment of the questionnaire, but also in the interview, to this issue. The key findings confirm the need to strengthen media, but also the necessity of improving digital literacy and security-related skills, due to the environment in which we find ourselves. More trainings are needed, both for students and young people in general, but other citizens should not be forgotten about either. More work should be invested in networking, but also in media and information literacy campaigns, in order to reach out to larger audience and raise awareness among the public.

Sustainability and effectiveness



As the most important aspects of future MIL actions, respondents singled out the strengthening of media literacy (30%), digital literacy (24%) and ICT literacy/Internet security (17%). This is followed by newspaper literacy (10%), information literacy (8%) and cultural literacy (6%). As few as 4% respondents emphasised the need for the improvement of basic or general literacy, while only one singled out the importance of improving library literacy (1%).

What types of actions would be most effective in mapping the media and information literacy categories (MIL)?



The most effective actions in the mapping out of MIL activity categories are trainings and educations, as pointed out with 23%. Campaigning and networking came in second with 19%, research and fundraising came was the third with 16%, followed by community involvement with 8%. Institutions and organisations do not see advocacy and resource building as priority tasks in this area.

Cooperation and synergies between different stakeholders

In order to assess the challenges and needs in the country regarding the strengthening of MIL in formal and informal education, 13 online in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives of organisations and institutions in Serbia, namely: five interviews with representatives of the civil sector, four with representatives of formal educational institutions, three with representatives from the media industry, one with a representative of a public authority and one with a representative of libraries.

This part will showcase three topics that will be the main focus: the approach to solving MIL, challenges in the field of MIL and best practices related to MIL.

Milica Janjatović Jovanović from the Novi Sad School of Journalism points out that it is necessary to work primarily on changing formal education, which is outdated, but that we should not forget the responsibility of the media. As the third and most important thing, she points out the cooperation of the civil sector, which is currently the pillar of media literacy in Serbia.

“What we lack as a civil society is unification. It often happens that we hear about one another’s activities only after the activity has been finalised or while it is being implemented. It would be much more meaningful, for example, if we joined forces, if we covered different target groups, if we didn’t all publish the same handbook, if we didn’t all cover the same topics. We need to initiate this type of action voluntarily, to unite in order to work more systematically.”

Marta Mitrović from the Media Polis Association from Niš says that the key is in formal education, and that MIL must be introduced from the lowest grades.

“Not as an elective subject, not as subjects that will be taught by someone who must fill the class load, but [as] a serious subject where the matter will be seriously studied. Informal education and trainings are good, but they do not cover a wide range of people. They are good as a supplement and as an incentive.”

The full professor of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade, Ana Martinoli, PhD, agrees with the two interlocutors. She says that the introduction of MIL is a process that cannot be left to just one level, but the state should participate in it through its laws and institutions.

“Education must be permanent; it is not a process that ends at some point. There must be an exchange, through an interactive process between the one who teaches and the one who receives that knowledge.”

Head of the Department of Communication and Journalism of the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš, assistant professor Neven Obradović, PhD, says that without the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we cannot really understand society, because the media shape it to the greatest extent.

“As a department, we are trying to influence and spread the idea that the Language, Media, and Culture course should not bear that particular name. We should rather have a Media Literacy course and this course should be taught by graduated students of journalism and communication studies, who are the only ones competent in society to actually teach that course and accurately convey to the students everything that media literacy is. I hope that this will be recognised in society.”

Assistant professor Marko Nedeljković from the Faculty of Political Sciences, says that the work of non-governmental organisations does not suffice and that, if we want to develop a real critical attitude, government representatives must understand the importance of MIL.

“The effects of media and information literacy, no matter how much we all work on it, in my opinion, are very limited and narrowed down to one circle of people, because we cannot work with all groups, and therefore the circle of people who can benefit from it is also very narrowed. I really believe that there should be more insistence on involving state institutions that are supposed to deal with this, but not at the same level as before.”

Professor Dejan Pralica, PhD, from the Media Studies Department of the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad believes that the Serbian language and language culture must be studied at all faculties for at least one semester, because a good part of academic citizens, as he points out, nowadays do not know how to express themselves properly. When it comes to media literacy, Pralica says that it is important for the general literacy and culture of modern man.”

NUNS General Secretary Tamara Filipović Stevanović does not agree with the opinions of previous interlocutors. She points out that no new course dedicated to critical thinking and MIL should be introduced, because, as she says, it is an integral part of every science.

“In human nature, it is to ask questions and to doubt, or at least it should be. Critical thinking is something that should be encouraged in faculties that educate the teaching staff. I believe that it is necessary to highlight it and work more on it. There is undoubtedly a need for improving the knowledge of all lecturers about the digital space and everything it brings to us.”

Nemanja Marinović from Centar E8 and editor of the youth portal Zoomer.rs has a different perspective. He points out that the educational system must become more attuned to the younger generations who are present on social media because they possess a lot of knowledge and are much more immersed in various information technologies.

“Society has dramatically changed – required readings are no longer read, but listened to on Spotify and various other platforms, to the point that young people no longer get information from the traditional media, but exclusively on social networks. MIL must be part of the compulsory curriculum, because young people are born with phones, not with a notebook and pen. The problem is that it involves other issues because the staff that would teach the MIL is not sensitised and does not keep up with modern trends. First, the school would have

to get out of its outdated, defined framework and see in what century the school is currently functioning, and then it has to go through other levels, such as the education of parents, who are a key factor, and the education of young people themselves who spend too much time on social networks. They themselves are not aware of the danger, nor of the fact that these social networks create the world for them and that the information they get is not an objective reality."

Tamara Stankov from Media and Reform Centre Niš says that it is crucial to introduce MIL into education in kindergarten.

"All sources of information are available to children long before they can understand them, so it is important to start educating them in time. Not only children but also parents. Access through media content is also important – it's not important that someone knows what MIL is, it's important that they know what tools they can use to verify the information."

Maja Zarić from the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications emphasises that the improvement of the level of the Ministry could be assessed using the MIL index.

"In order to better understand how something can be improved, I believe we first need to know how it is measured. The MIL self-perception index of the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications was established within the framework of the New Literacy programme, and it has showed some improvement year after year as the project progressed. However, it might be necessary to develop a new measurement index. MIL is a broad field, and we don't actually have an established methodology to determine our position on that list. In my opinion, it would be necessary to establish an index in relation to other measurable indexes based on European methodologies. We will strive, with the help of international partners, to focus on this in the near future, specifically on creating an index and measuring improvements. I believe there is certainly room for improvement because there is a number of activities in the domain of MIL. However, it's never enough considering the technological changes in society, and therefore, MIL is not at a sufficiently high level."

When it comes to MIL challenges, the key is the lack of long-term funding for MIL projects, resulting in a loss of contact with the target groups you have been working with. According to the research of the Novi Sad School of Journalism, the subject Language, Media, and Culture is popular among high school students, and this is shown by the research data, however, when they analysed the results of that programme, i.e., student presentations on the school websites, it was seen that there is a lot of wrong information and overlooked points.

"It can be seen that they misunderstood some things in the field of regulation and self-regulation, so then the students criticise something that the media does well, thinking that the media should not act like that, and so on. It can be seen that in practice it doesn't work exactly as it should, and that's why the challenge when we do MIL training is that we can't follow up the target group to the end. Of course, we go back to the school, advise the teachers, however, we cannot monitor the implementation on a systemic level."

Sandra Nikolić from the City of Belgrade Library points out that their biggest challenge was working with students, because the most difficult part was starting the discussion.

"They were more passive, while fellow librarians were extremely eager to discuss and analyse the content, which at the end, caused some problems for colleagues because of the hourly schedule of the training."

Ana Duraki, the manager of the Learn and Discern programme from the IREX organisation in Serbia, points out that they encountered technical and essential challenges in their work.

"We had challenges in the technical sense as an international organisation that cannot accredit its programme as it is registered as a non-resident. Sometimes, it was difficult from the technical point of view due to the fact that the American Embassy is our donor and that it is viewed in a certain way, especially when it comes to the formal education system where we were supposed to conduct training. On the other hand, we recognised the challenge of engaging young people. They are very hard to motivate and engage. I still think that they rely on authorities, and that progress can be achieved through cooperation with their teachers. There is no space for young people to step in, for them to be peer educators and to see where they can act in a certain way within their communities. They still have a slightly more passive approach to it all."

Tamara Filipović Stevanović from NUNS points out that MIL is being made into a big bogey and that this is something that has existed for a long time.

"It's developing critical thinking or practicing the ethics of professional journalism. Now it is considered as some kind of new science, which I think is unnecessary. There are challenges when it comes to improving the skills of journalists, because in Serbia we are actually lagging a lot behind the world, when it comes to using advanced tools. As a result, we may not have enough expertise when looking for someone to come and provide content that is now offered at our trainings and education sessions."

When it comes to the work of the E8 Centre, Nemanja Marinović points out that the MIL challenges concern their reach, which is connected to the financial plan.

“If we are focused on digital media and social networks, if we don’t push financially, the algorithm won’t be very favourable to us. The biggest problem is reaching a wider audience and getting out of the bubble. As for concrete work with young people, the biggest challenge is to conscientise them regarding some things that they have already learnt through monitoring the media, which may not have been critical enough, and to return to the fact that, no matter how much we are bombarded with different types of low-quality content, we actually know what is ethical and what is not.”

Assistant professor Neven Obradović, PhD from the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš says that the process of familiarising first-year journalism students with media studies is very challenging, due to the way they understand and read the media.

“It is important that they observe critically and, in that way, become ‘infected’ by the media, it is important that we teach them to follow the media and to know how to read them. Later, over the years, they will become people who critically assess the media, and this makes it much easier for us to work in classes, where we jointly analyse the media image of Serbia and the world.”

Assistant professor, Marko Nedeljković PhD, from the Faculty of Political Sciences points out that the biggest challenge is to interest those who follow you, and he believes that MIL is an elusive category that implies a lot.

“Another challenge with MIL is that it is very difficult to engage and interest someone to seriously deal with it. The topic itself may not be very attractive, and I dare saying it’s even a little dull. In reality, it mostly depends on the approach to the topic.”

His colleague from the Faculty of Dramatic Arts, Anna Martinoli, PhD, sees the biggest challenge to be in confronting students with the prejudices they hold.

“I think the problem is that not all of us – and I’m referring to colleagues from the Faculty of Dramatic Arts, especially to those from artistic fields engaged in content creation – are equally sensitised. We lack sufficient knowledge and skills to efficiently convey this knowledge to the new generations, who are entirely different from us and have different ways of reading/listening/learning. I think that the young audience consumes media in a different way, and semi-consciously absorbs many meanings without questioning them. I think this is a new skill that will be most challenging to acquire because there is an overwhelming amount of content, which is easy to absorb without questioning.”

Professor Dejan Pralica, PhD, from the Department of Media Studies of the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad sees the biggest challenge to be in the students' superficial knowledge of media and social networks, i.e. uncritical thinking and ignorance when it comes to the importance of checking information sources, the relevance of some information and the extent to which a piece of information is of public importance or not.

The interlocutors point out that there are already established good practices in relation to MIL. Nevertheless, they emphasise direct involvement in the work and production of media content, quizzes, joint work on publishing lessons and teachers' books, handbooks for trainers, youth, journalists, and other professionals as the best practice.

As for Milica Janjatović Jovanović from the Novi Sad School of Journalism, the teachers direct involvement in the development of teaching materials, which includes the incorporation of MIL into specific teaching units, has proven to be an excellent practice.

“Through other research that we have conducted, we obtained the results showing that teachers miss it, that they are interested in it, but that they get confused when they should apply MIL in their class, and they don't know where to implement it. This is why handbooks like these come in very handy, primarily because they were prepared by their colleagues who already know the dynamics of the class. When it comes to students, it is necessary to involve them as much as possible in the production of media content – through this workshop work, they also get the knowledge of where to look for relevant sources of information and other important things.”

Marta Mitrović from the Media Polis Association points out that it is important to reach children through various applications and games that involve education about media content.

“It is impossible to bring back primary and high school students solely to books and teach them MIL from them.”

Professor Ana Martinoli, PhD, says the key is getting others involved.

“It is important that the people we train come to a conclusion on their own, through activities. We aren't supposed just to retell, but to include them in the very process of learning.”

Assistant professor Neven Obradović, PhD, believes that it is important to constantly monitor everything that is happening in the world and to apply that knowledge in practice within the course, and he singles out a film in class as the best example of this.

Assistant professor Marko Nedeljković, PhD, from the Faculty of Political Sciences points out that practical work is the most important to convince someone to think.

"The greatest delight comes when you give someone the opportunity to say something, to get involved and when you give them some feedback through the conversation. And afterwards you ask them one more time: 'And what do you think about it?'. It's amazing how much students and young people miss that kind of approach. This is not about going to the podium and lecturing. It is important to ask and engage young people. MIL is not a matter of lecturing, but a matter of inciting someone to think."

Sandra Nikolić from the Belgrade City Library points out that quizzes are an extremely innovative tool, which is great for young people.

"We use Kahoot and use it to measure acquired knowledge before and after the quiz. Also, we use video animation materials that already exist on YouTube. We believe that it is much more important for young people, because they are more oriented towards visual content than textual content."

Tamara Filipović Stevanović from NUNS says that they tried to approach young people as much as possible, and organised workshops for high school students with the Press Council.

"We worked with Njuz.net on workshops with children at school, where we presented news which was true and news which was made up, prepared by Njuz.net. It's important to work directly, and games for the young are something to work on when it comes to MIL. The Tijana Jurić Foundation's workshops on predators and the protection of children who have had such an experience are excellent. They did those workshops for educators and high school students, and it should be brought down to lower age, that is, to lower classes."

Nemanja Marinović from Centar E8 says that we do not need innovative approaches, because we already have very good tools.

"The problem is that these tools are not institutionalised and do not reach young people. What we use is the most classic approach – here you go, now think, look at this, analyse it, and if you see something problematic, just think. It is important to nurture critical thinking, and to constantly repeat that young people must learn to think."

In order to approach young people in a better and more innovative way, the Learn and Discern programme decided to include trivia evenings with an educational and entertaining character.

“Thus, through trivia evenings, young people participate in a fun and educational format where they can hear more about the MIL. If young people are online, then an online course makes more sense, and that’s why we launched our online platform Thought&Verified. Also, in the new curriculum that we updated, we included artificial intelligence, which we consider to be extremely important”, says Ana Duraki.

Maja Zarić from the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications points out that they have created an application for teachers that includes handbooks with a user-friendly digital tool.

“In the upcoming period, we plan to adapt the application with international partners. As an innovative approach, I would single out the mini-series ‘Heroes of Media Literacy’, which deals with 18 topics from the handbook. This series was broadcast between blocks of classes that were held online during the Covid-19 pandemic and was later transmitted on public media services – RTS and RTV. Together with the EU Centre, we were among the first to launch a series of webinars on the topic of disinformation, the information pandemic, and other topics during the Covid-19 pandemic, which continued throughout the state of emergency. Similar topics were raised by UNESCO only later, in June”.

Professor Dejan Pralica, PhD, from the Department of Media Studies of the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad points out that the media is interesting *per se*, and that it is important to show to young people some of the details that they may have missed or did not pay attention to.

“Very quickly they become aware of the importance that the media have for a democratic society and how pluralism of opinion and critical reflection forms an integral part of their lives, which they were not aware of until a certain moment. They just need to be encouraged to do so. My lectures are never the same. It all depends on the group of students I have in the classroom. Sometimes we just talk, sometimes we argue, sometimes we look at examples and comment together.”

Tamara Stankov from the Media and Reform Centre Niš points out that they are constantly looking for innovative approaches.

“Based on my experience so far, I can say that practical work, interactivity and examples are key for someone to understand MIL and their importance.”

Conclusion

On the basis of quantitative analysis and in-depth interviews, we concluded that MIL is an exceptionally significant field of work for numerous organisations and institutions in Serbia. To further advance it, it is essential to change the formal educational system, which, according to some interviewees, is outdated and not keeping up with the times. They also underscore the importance of supporting non-governmental organisations that strengthen MIL through projects and various initiatives, encouraging critical thinking among citizens.

Some organisations have been advocating for the incorporation of MIL into the formal educational system for many years. Part of MIL is taught within the subject of Language, Media, and Culture; however, research conducted by the Novi Sad School of Journalism indicates that the outcomes of this subject are not always satisfactory. There is a significant occurrence of missed points and incorrect information. According to the Novi Sad School of Journalism study, teachers are more informationally literate than their students, but not at a level that would enable them to teach the subject requiring knowledge and experience in deconstructing media messages without proper preparation. Moreover, as some interviewees observe, skills are needed to make the MIL topic and learning more interactive and engaging. This highlights the paramount role of civil society organisations that train the teaching staff in MIL through their projects.

Just how important MIL is, is shown by the fact that all the interlocutors emphasise that it must be introduced from preschool education, because children are largely exposed to the media from an early childhood. Apart from children, students, and young people, we should also work on the education of parents, whose role in this process is very important.

To avoid the accumulation of redundant project outputs, some non-governmental organisations propose networking, which is currently lacking but could significantly contribute to further developing MIL. Each organisation would specialise in specific fields such as research, campaign implementation, training, and other essential components related to MIL. Furthermore, establishing a robust methodology to measure the MIL index is crucial so that progress evaluation is not solely based on self-assessment. Measuring the MIL index is significant to track improvements before and after specific training sessions, enabling the monitoring of progress in this field.

The overall conclusion of this research is that non-governmental organisations, institutional bodies, librarians, and formal educational institutions have all recognised the necessity and importance of Media and Information Literacy. Moving forward, efforts should be directed towards enhancing and reinforcing MIL, making it a key priority for the future.



Recommendations

In order to improve MIL in formal and informal education, we put forward the following recommendations:

- The introduction of MIL into the formal educational system from the lowest level of education
- MIL lessons must be given by teachers who have undergone adequate training programmes. The possibility of including graduates of journalism and communication studies should be considered
- Networking and cooperation of the civil sector for better systematisation of projects and project ideas
- Integration of MIL into teacher education at all faculties where teachers are trained
- Providing continuous education to citizens in the field of MIL through projects conducted by relevant civil society organisations
- Create a methodology that will successfully measure the knowledge and skills of MIL before and after the training/education
- Involve the consumers of training/education in the implementation of content: publications, research, media content, campaigns, text content, video content.



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Annex list of institutions / organisations

- Media and Reform Centre Niš,
- Commissioner for the Protection of Equality,
- Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina (NDNV),
- Propulsion,
- Centar E8 – Portal Zoomer.rs,
- Kritički,
- IREX,
- Istinomer,
- FakeNews Tracker,
- Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (NUNS),
- Belgrade City Library,
- Centre for Media Professionalisation (CEPROM),
- Library Plus,
- Association of Journalists of Serbia (UNS),
- City smart club,
- Youth Empowerment Club 018 (KOM018),
- Ministry of Information and Telecommunications,
- Youth Vibes,
- Department of Communication and Journalism, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš,
- Novi Sad School of Journalism,
- Department of Media Studies, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad,
- Department of Journalism and Communication, Faculty of Political Sciences, Belgrade,
- Faculty of Dramatic Arts, University of Belgrade
- and Media Polis Niš.

Annex list of people with whom an in-depth interview was conducted

- Milica Janjatović Jovanović, Novi Sad School of Journalism,
- Jovana Prešić, Istinomer,
- Marta Mitrović, Media Polis Association,
- Ana Martinoli, Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade,
- Neven Obradović, Faculty of Philosophy in Niš,
- Dejan Pralica, Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad,
- Marko Nedeljković, Faculty of Political Sciences in Belgrade,
- Sandra Nikolić, Belgrade City Library,
- Tamara Filipović Stevanović, Independent Association of Serbian Journalists,
- Tamara Stankov, Media and Reform Centre Niš,
- Nemanja Marinović, Centar E8 / Portal Zoomer.rs,
- Ana Duraki, IREX Serbia,
- Maja Zarić, Ministry of Information and Telecommunication



Scale up MediaCoach (CoachMIL) project aims at improving media literacy capacities in Croatia, Serbia, and Albania based on the Media Coach programme, successfully implemented in several EU countries so far. The project aims to strengthen local media and digital literacy training capacities; design innovative and efficient training programme; develop and disseminate an online media literacy toolkit; mobilise creative potentials in innovative media production.

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