European Digital Media Observatory

Media literacy in Europe and the role of EDMO

September 2021

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Introduction

Media literacy is undoubtedly a crucial tool in the fight against disinformation. A public that is both critically and digitally literate is much more likely to be able to assess the information they encounter online, to identify sources they can trust, and make well-informed decisions as citizens, consumers, and more. Being media literate opens up opportunities to engage more fully and more creatively with the online (and offline) media world.

Media literacy education is crucial for adults as well as children. It's not something that you learn once and then you're done. It's about both practical skills, and just as importantly about knowledge and awareness of the digital environment and how it operates. In this sense, it is a life-long process as digital and media environments are constantly evolving.

It is certainly not the only solution to the problem of disinformation, and shouldn't be seen as a silver bullet that renders other regulations and initiatives unnecessary. As Professor Sonia Livingstone has frequently argued, media literacy tends to be seen by policy makers as an easy win, but in fact it is incredibly complicated. There is so much about the online world that is illegible and constantly changing, and it is crucial to avoid burdening the citizen with the responsibility of understanding the incomprehensible.

That said, media literacy is an essential partner to regulation in terms of improving the public's ability to navigate the online environment. Many regulations will be less effective without an accompanying level of education and awareness, and there is clear scope to expand this. An Ipsos Mori survey from March 2021 found that just 9% of Europeans (from 11 countries) have participated in training about how to use online tools to distinguish between true and false information, but 58% are interested in doing so. Two-thirds of those surveyed believed it would be appropriate for a tech company to provide training to users to improve their ability to critically understand online information.

Media literacy's value in tackling disinformation should not be seen in isolation. While many of the concerns about online disinformation have emerged in recent years, media literacy work has been ongoing for decades and has a wider role to play in citizenship. There is a tendency to see media literacy as the solution to a particular problem such as disinformation (or online safety, digital inclusion, hate speech, radicalisation etc), but this can be problematic as it narrows the focus, and leads to short-term thinking, when what is needed is long-term planning and funding, ideally with a timeline of a decade or more. Raising general media literacy levels will increase the public's resilience to online misinformation, even if this is not the direct target of an intervention.

Below, several factors to consider are outlined, before explaining the proposed course of action.

The complexity of the media literacy landscape

Defining media literacy

Media literacy is a complex, intertwined set of skills and competences. According to the [Media Literacy Expert Group](#) chaired by the European Commission, media literacy includes all technical, cognitive, social, civic and creative capacities that allow citizens to access the media, to have a critical understanding of it and to interact with it.

Looking a bit more at what this means in practice, a [2018 survey of media literacy teaching in schools](#) defined five essential media literacy competences (based on [a framework described in a 2010 report by Renee Hobbs](#)):

- access
- analysis and evaluation
- creation
- reflection
- action/agency

A 2016 [mapping project carried out by the European Audiovisual Observatory](#) identified five categories of skills addressed by the projects:

1. Creativity: such as creating, building and generating media content.
2. Critical thinking: such as understanding how the media industry works and how media messages are constructed; questioning the motivations of content producers in order to make informed choices about content selection and use; recognising different types of media content and evaluating content for truthfulness, reliability and value for money; recognising and managing online security and safety risks.
3. Intercultural dialogue: such as challenging radicalisation and hate speech.
4. Media use: such as the ability to search, find and navigate and use media content and services.
5. Participation and interaction: interaction, engagement and participation in the economic, social, creative, cultural aspects of society through the media and promoting democratic participation and fundamental rights.

[LSE's Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) on Online Misinformation and Media Literacy](#) for Ofcom found that research shows that three types of media literacy skills have consistently been found to be effective in critically engaging with misinformation:

- critical thinking, including asking questions about where information comes from
- evaluation strategies, including a reflective approach to one's status as an audience member
- knowledge of the operation of news and media industries.

It also specified that "digital literacy is at the cutting edge of media literacy interventions, because misinformation is most widespread and has the greatest potential influence via online media."

A wide range of possible interventions

Developing media literacy skills is a process of aquiring knowledge and understanding that results in behaviour change. As a 2020 Council of Europe report prepared by the Committee of experts on quality journalism in the digital age found following an assessment of 68 media literacy activities: "Different groups of people will require different MIL interventions at different points on their learning journeys and no single organisation or sector can be expected to achieve this range of MIL support on their own."

Media literacy projects range from mass public awareness campaigns to highly-targeted in-person training for individuals; they could produce games or YouTube videos or library resources; they could generate online nudges or they could engage school children in conversation about media and democracy.

The different players involved

There are a great number of organisations and individuals involved in media literacy work, including policy makers, educational bodies, regulators, researchers, schools, libraries, campaigners, NGOs, news organisations (particularly public service media), tech companies, and more.

Even at a Europe-wide level, there are many different stakeholders in the media literacy field. As an example of the diverse players, there are:

Various **European Commission departments** that work on media literacy, including:
- The Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology (DG Connect)
- The Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC)

Along with Commission-affiliated initiatives such as:
- Better Internet for Kids , which runs Safer Internet Centres across Europe. Co-funded by the European Commission in Member States, and also operating in Iceland, Norway, Russia and the United Kingdom, Safer Internet Centres strive to keep children and young people safe online through a range of actions and initiatives.

The **Council of Europe** also produces research, recommendations and educational tools to promote media literacy.

Networks of **media regulators**:
- [The European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services](#) (ERGA)
- [The European Platform of Regulatory Authorities](#) (EPRA)

Non-profit organisations such as:

- [The Media & Learning Association](#), which aims to use media to enhance innovation and creativity in teaching and learning across all levels of education in Europe. It has an annual conference and awards, and organises webinars and workshops.
- [EAVI: Media Literacy for Citizenship](#) (European Association for Viewers Interests) aims to empower European media users through lobbying, conferences, networking, research and other projects to work towards creating a healthy, democratic and cohesive society.

Diversity across the continent

One of the key challenges for anyone working on media literacy in Europe is that there is such huge diversity across the continent in terms of the level of activities in different countries, and how they are organised and overseen. In some countries it is evident who is responsible for promoting and addressing media literacy, while in others there is no body or institution with a clear mandate. Some have a very involved regulatory authority, others do not, and in some media literacy is a significant part of the formal education provision, while in others it is not.

The current landscape: policy, regulators and tech companies

Media literacy in EU-level policy

The **Audiovisual Media Services Directive** was revised in 2018 in light of changing market realities and includes requirements for Member States to promote measures that develop media literacy skills, and obligations for video-sharing platforms to provide effective media literacy measures and tools.

The AVMSD stresses that:
"Media literacy should not be limited to learning about tools and technologies, but should aim to equip citizens with the critical thinking skills required to exercise judgment, analyse complex realities and recognise the difference between opinion and fact. It is therefore necessary that both media service providers and video-sharing platforms providers, in cooperation with all relevant stakeholders, promote the development of media literacy in all sections of society, for citizens of all ages, and for all media and that progress in that regard is followed closely."

Article 33(a) of the revised AVMSD states that:
"1. Member States shall promote and take measures for the development of media literacy skills.

2. By 19 December 2022 and every three years thereafter, Member States shall report to the Commission on the implementation of paragraph 1.

3. The Commission shall, after consulting the Contact Committee, issue guidelines regarding the scope of such reports.'."

Article 28(b) lists "providing for effective media literacy measures and tools and raising users' awareness of those measures and tools" as one of the measures that video-sharing platform providers must take to protect the public from potential harms.

According to an October 2020 Commission Staff Working Document sent to the Council of the European Union:

"Since the last Report, only a few Member States have carried out a formal assessment of media literacy levels and have been capable to provide data in this regard.

The great majority of Member States, even if currently involved in projects and measures for the development of media literacy among their citizens, do not have specific tools for the assessment of media literacy levels in their territories. This confirms the difficulty in establishing objective and empirical criteria. Some Member States have put in place different actions and initiatives that were assessed independently. Other Member States used private surveys while developing more structured measurement methods that should be adopted in the next years.

Those Member States where an assessment is performed, generally adopt systems of measurement differentiated on subjective conditions (age, vulnerability etc.) and special attention seems to be given to children and adolescent population.
In general, it appears that only three Member States have assessed the level of media literacy for their entire population in a systematic way. Consequently, general data about levels of media literacy in the Member States is lacking. Even if different Member States referred to various studies, surveys and research carried out in their territories, only five Member States provided some data."

[The European Democracy Action Plan](#) was announced in December 2020 (shortly before the Digital Services Act (DSA) and Digital Markets Act (DMA)). Countering disinformation is one of the Plan's three pillars.

It identifies four types of misinformation:
- misinformation
- disinformation
- information influencing operation
- foreign interference in the information space.

One of the ways it proposes to tackle disinformation is through empowering citizens by strengthening media literacy, specifying that the Commission will support media literacy

projects under the new cross-sectoral strand of the Creative Europe programme, as well as other programmes that involve young people and schools such as Erasmus+, and the priority theme for etwinning in 2021 is media literacy and disinformation.

Also in December 2020, the European Commission published a communication to complement the EDAP - "**Europe's Media in the Digital Decade: An Action Plan to Support Recovery and Transformation**" which focused on the impact of the pandemic on the news media sector and audiovisual entertainment.

This specified that "*the Commission, together with the European Group of Audiovisual Regulators (ERGA) and other experts, as well as and in dialogue with video-sharing platforms, will develop a toolbox to improve users' awareness, improve their critical skills and choices and to help users reach a greater variety of media content available on video sharing platforms… Implementation of the toolbox will also be part of AVMSD media literacy reports, the scope of which will be determined via Commission guidelines to be issued in 2021.*"

Tackling disinformation through digital literacy education is also listed as a priority of the EC's **Digital Education Action Plan** (2021-27), which specifies that the Commission will work on developing common guidelines for teachers and educational staff to foster digital literacy and tackle disinformation through education and training.

The European Digital Competence Framework, also known as DigComp, offers a tool to improve citizens' digital competence. Citizens can assess their own digital skills, and the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) offers an indicator for Digital Skills using the DigComp framework. The related European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (DigCompEdu) provides a general reference frame to support the development of educator-specific digital competences, directed towards educators at all levels of education, from early childhood to higher and adult education, including general and vocational education and training, special needs education, and non-formal learning contexts.

The European Commission also brings together media literacy stakeholders in **an Expert Group on Media Literacy** (MLEG) which meets annually to:

- identify, document and extend good practices in the field of media literacy;
- facilitate networking between different stakeholders, with the aim of cross-fertilisation;
- explore synergies between different EU policies and support programmes and media literacy initiatives.

The group comprises representatives of member states, plus observers from the Council of Europe and UNESCO and other relevant organisations.

The role of regulators

European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services (ERGA)

The function of ERGA is to is to ensure the consistent implementation of the Revised AVMS Directive and to facilitate cooperation amongst the NRAs and between the NRAs and the Commission in this regard. ERGA plans to closely track how implementation of the AVMSD occurs across the European Union. One of the agreed goals of ERGA and NRAs (as defined by the revised AVMSD) is "Exchanging experience and best practices with other NRAs on the application of the regulatory framework for audiovisual media services, including on accessibility and media literacy."

ERGA sees MIL as a topic that needs particular attention from media regulators and proposes the establishment of a dedicated Action Group. ERGA's Work Programme for 2021 states that: *"Acknowledging the ever-increasing importance of media literacy in all areas of media consumption, a third Action Group will try to give a more nuanced and focused meaning to the whole concept of media literacy. Building upon the work of EPRA's taskforce on media literacy, the Action Group will on the one hand promote specific projects on a European level and on the other hand develop incentives for European-wide initiatives. Doing so, the Action Group will also assist the Commission in providing technical input in view of developing guidelines on the scope of Member States reports on media literacy."*

ERGA is in the process of preparing a new report on media literacy practices in relation to the Code of Practice on Disinformation, which includes recommendations to code signatories on how to make MIL initiatives more effective. In producing this report, they identified problems in gathering data, including the limitations of self-assessment, both from tech companies and NRAs.

European Platform of Regulatory Authorities (EPRA)

Part of EPRA's stated mission is to explore "innovative means of regulating and analysing the audiovisual sector and of empowering audiences through media and information literacy and sharing that with a wider audience of stakeholders."

EPRA's MIL taskforce produces guidelines, eg top tips on planning media literacy campaigns, on researching media literacy, building networks, evaluating campaigns, and engaging with stakeholders. Specific resources on network building are available here. It produces research such as a report on the promotion of Media Literacy by Video Sharing Platforms.

EPRA also gathers information on members' activity, providing for example:
- a list of media literacy activities carried out by EPRA members to tackle misinformation as a response to the COVID-19 crisis (July 2020)
- A list of wider initiatives (including those targeting MIL) from members in response to the COVID-19 crisis (October 2020)

Tech companies and the Code of Practice

Most major tech companies are signatories to the EU Code of Practice on Disinformation, a self-regulatory instrument designed to fight disinformation which is currently undergoing consultation to 'strengthen' it and move to a co-regulatory model as outlined in the Digital Services Act.

ERGA surveyed assessed the media literacy activities of tech companies for its May 2020 *Report on Disinformation: Assessment of the Implementation of the Code of Practice*. This monitoring exercise, carried out with the collaboration of 13 national regulatory authorities (NRAs), showed that consumers of all the platforms are primarily supported in two ways:

• via the interface of the platforms through labelling and links to additional information, and

• more broadly, through media literacy or fact-checking initiatives.

ERGA found that tech companies who signed the Code have entered into various partnerships with media companies and educational organizations to plan and execute media literacy campaigns. For example, Facebook and Google have organized trainings, but overall, the campaigns tend to involve only a tiny fraction of the total population (mainly journalists, politicians and schoolteachers), usually concentrated in major cities. Projects targeting older people were scarce. The NRAs also reported that often, the tools created by tech companies to help identify and report false information are not available in all countries. The self-assessment reports published by the Code's signatories contained very little country-specific data. Additionally, the absence of data on the uptake and impact of these initiatives provided by the platforms means that ERGA was not able to assess their effectiveness.

ERGA suggests that, although platforms are making an evident effort to invest in products and programmes that address public understanding, the efforts made by the Code's signatories to foster media literacy initiatives should be part of a more systematic campaign and should address a larger proportion of the population, in cooperation with Ministries of education where possible.

The European Commission's assessment of the Code also cited the lack of data as a problem. The Commission and signatories are calling for more members.

Where does EDMO fit in?

In the tender specifications with reference to media literacy, it was proposed that:
"Via a public portal, the DSI will provide media practitioners, teachers and citizens with information and material aimed at increasing awareness, building societal resilience to online disinformation and support media literacy campaigns. The portal should become the reference point for promoting European and national media literacy activities related to the disinformation problem and provide evidence for future-proof policies on disinformation."

Specifically, it suggests the creation of "searchable directories aggregating fact-checks and media literacy material from external repositories," including at least 200 pieces of media literacy material, which much be continuously and systematically reviewed and updated.

Members of the EDMO Advisory Group on Media Literacy expressed doubt about the usefulness of a straightforward repository of media literacy activities, and encouraged EDMO to more carefully consider the target audience and benefits of such an effort, particularly taking into consideration what has already been done and others working in the area.

Conversations with experts also identified the difficulty of creating a centralized resource that was genuinely searchable, and the subsequent challenge of encouraging people to use it.

Existing mapping/repository-building

A noteworthy mapping exercise was carried out in 2016: Mapping of media literacy practices and actions in EU-28. Commissioned by the European Commission and carried out by the Council of Europe's European Audiovisual Observatory (EAVO), it aimed to identify trends at regional, national and European levels, and to inspire the development of new projects and collaborations.

It analysed 547 'significant' media literacy projects (outside of school curricular) from across 28 EU countries, and also summarised the 'most significant' projects across Europe. This involved a questionnaire to an expert in each country who was asked to identify the 20 most significant media literacy projects since 2010, and to give a detailed description of the 5 most significant within these.

The national experts were asked about the project type and sector, the skills that it targeted, the scale of the project and the time period, and the reasons for significance. It enabled analysis of the different types of projects that were running, and the different skills that these were addressing, as well as the reach and audience groups who were being targeted. The resulting report is an impressive body of work, despite the difficulty of defining 'significance' in different national contexts.

EAVI is also in the process of compiling a list of media literacy related organisations throughout the EU, which are displayed by country through an interactive map, and include a brief description.

Goals and target audience

In terms of the role that EDMO can play, conversations with experts and practitioners have identified a desire for:

- Clarity in terms of who is doing what, who is responsible for what. It is an immensely complex field.

- A place to increase awareness among the various stakeholders involved of the different types of initiatives going on, for example, educators and regulators who might not have much contact elsewhere.
- Strengthening and developing existing networks, increasing coordination at a European level.
- Best practices for those looking at what to do, including a typology or categorization of different activities, including examples of different types of projects and materials for campaigning, education etc.
- A way to amplify the reach of effective projects.
- A place to find out exactly what tech platforms/VSPs are doing in each country.

- A place to find out what funding opportunities are available for media literacy projects.
- Help with measuring impact and effectiveness, which s is a definite challenge in this area.

EDMO's audience is likely to be media literacy stakeholders across Europe: practitioners, policymakers, regulators, funders and more. These will include members of the existing and future national hubs who are all planning media literacy activities.

The **national hubs** will be crucial for making a practical difference in terms of ML in Europe. It makes sense that these efforts learn from one another and that any initiative is geared towards making them more effective.

The direct links with national contexts via the hubs is one of the strengths of the EDMO model and it could be argued that rather than EDMO creating its own media literacy resources, it makes more sense to ensure that the hubs are best supported in their efforts, and that valuable initiatives are highlighted and shared to promote the exchange of knowledge and ideas. This would have a positive impact on the sector as a whole, and complements the statement in the European Democracy Action Plan that "*EDMO and the multidisciplinary community coordinated by it, will provide support to national media literacy campaigns aiming at strengthening citizens' ability to assess the quality and veracity of online information, including citizens with additional needs. Through the work of its national hubs, the EDMO will identify specific issues to be tackled.*"

Proposal

Rather than a straightforward mapping exercise, it could be more valuable (and feasible) to approach the task slightly differently in a way that allows for a more flexible format. EDMO can become a vital resource for the media literacy community in Europe, providing expertise, ideas and opportunities for connection that will empower media literacy practitioners and others in the fight against disinformation.

The website should include the following resources:

Background content

Introduction to media literacy, its importance, complexity and challenges, and in particular how it relates to tackling disinformation. We could include views from Advisory Group members and other experts here, and the latest thinking on issues such as evaluation, which are relevant to many practitioners and others. This can include a discussion of formal education and trends towards a focus on digital literacy. We can also make sure that key research is explained in an accessible manner.

Who's doing what

We will include an overview of Europe-wide stakeholders and their roles and priorities, from policymakers to civil society, with contacts wherever possible. This could encompass main activities from tech companies, or those could be included as good practices where relevant. We are investigating the clearest and most informative way to do this mapping.

Country profiles

Given the diversity and complexity of the European media literacy landscape, it would seem useful to create brief summaries of the situation in each country, specifying any public body with a media literacy mandate, identifying key stakeholders and any useful contacts, the focus of major projects and campaigns, and any gaps to be filled. We will include the status of media literacy within formal education in each country. We could start with the countries that have national hubs, and highlight the efforts of those countries that have significant media literacy initiatives.

Examples of good practice in specific areas (see below for more on criteria for inclusion)

Media literacy practitioners are likely to be seeking examples of specific types of projects that, for example, target particular skills, make interventions at particular points in the behaviour change process, or address particular audiences.

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We could therefore include examples of initiatives that demonstrate different aspects of good practice, such as:

- Successful multistakeholder projects, bringing together players from different sectors
- Projects with a focus on skills that have been shown by researchers to have significant impact, such as critical thinking or evaluation.
- Interventions at different times in the behaviour change process: addressing why people fall for misinformation and the actions at each stage that can stop this
- What a successful public awareness campaign looks like
- Educational materials with some demonstrable impact
- How to target different age groups such as older people, who are often harder to reach and under-served by media literacy campaigns.
- What public service media (or other news organisations) can do to help their audiences resist misinformation

These suggestions are based on conversations with experts and practitioners, but we could survey hubs and other contacts more widely to gather more. We will also think about how best to describe and categorise different projects and resources, whether according to the aspect of media literacy that they address, or to their target audience.

It will be necessary to keep these resources updated if they are to remain relevant, and we would encourage regular reviews.

Network building

There are some strong cross-border networks of regulators with a media literacy focus which play a valuable role, but communication between media literacy practitioners across Europe could be increased, and EDMO could enable this. There is also a potential lack of communication between policymakers who attend meetings such as the Media Literacy Experts Group meeting, and those working on media literacy 'on the ground,' and EDMO could improve this by highlighting the research and initiatives that are presented.

Increased networking is likely to have a positive impact on the media literacy sector as a whole, as collaboration is key in such a multi-faceted field. The EAO mapping study found that the majority of the 'most significant' media literacy projects were the result of cross-sector collaboration, and according to Ofcom's research "it is unlikely that an organisation working in isolation will be very effective at promoting media literacy in the long term."

We can work with the national hubs to decide on the best way to encourage networking and to ensure that the website enables others to participate also. We can advertise the events and networking opportunities of media literacy organisations, and potentially host networking and knowledge exchange events if resources allow.

Note: Criteria for inclusion as good practice

This is one of the toughest issues to resolve and needs to be handled carefully, as we would only want to highlight projects that are valuable and worth promoting, but it is extremely difficult to reach consensus on criteria that you can apply across countries – even best practices are hard to define.

The lack of established criteria and methods for assessing projects, along with perceived challenges, mean that many don't even attempt evaluation. Of the 68 projects [analysed by the Council of Europe's Committee of experts on quality journalism in the digital age](), one third did not undergo any form of evaluation or assessment.

The LSE/Ofcom Rapid Evidence review noted the difficulty of assessing the effectiveness of current interventions to tackle misinformation: *"In particular, efforts to educate audiences and change the ways they engage with information are fragmented across educational contexts, platform-specific initiatives, media-related initiatives and fact-checking services. As a result, their impact on audience knowledge, attitudes and behaviour towards misinformation is unclear."*

There have been limited efforts to define criteria with which to assess media literacy initiatives:

The 2016 EAVO mapping report used six parameters to define "significant" projects:
1. The size of the target audience
2. The total budget or cost of the project
3. The success of the project (outcomes/impact compared to objectives)
4. The level of public awareness of the project
5. The level of engagement by the target audience
Any other measurement that was relevant to that project.

ERGA has come up with 6 principles that taken together provide a framework for best practice:
- Transparency, visibility and consistency
- Multiskakeholder – who is working together?
- Reach – it is a breadth initiative, or is it to develop critical thinking in the classroom?
- Citizen/user focus
- Evaluation – how to evaluate the impact of the initiative
- Localisation – how to target in a way that makes sense to individuals.

We could choose to either adopt a framework from ERGA or an EC body like DG-Connect, or a combination of the two. We should continuously make use of the national expertise and knowledge within the hubs to assess and validate the projects that are featured. We could choose to only include projects that have undergone evaluation, and it will be crucial that we clearly state whether or not any resources we cite have been independently evaluated.

About this report

The information and suggestions in this report are based on desk research, as well as a number of valuable conversations with experts, and several meetings and webinars, including the below.

Meetings with:
- The EDMO Media Literacy Advisory Board
- EDMO National Hubs
- EPRA's Media Literacy Taskforce (EMIL)
- Media Literacy Experts Group meetings
- DG CONNECT
- DigComp Community of Practice

Webinars held by:
- EAVI
- ERGA
- EPRA
- Media Literacy Ireland
- The Media and Learning Association
- Ofcom