



Baltic Centre for
Media Excellence



Independent Journalism Center

MEDIA LITERACY SECTOR MAPPING
IN GEORGIA, LATVIA, MOLDOVA AND UKRAINE

Moldova Country Report

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Introduction

Media literacy is a core element of information consumption in a rapidly changing media environment. In such an environment, high media literacy within the audience also generates a demand for quality journalism and helps quality media to survive and develop, as well as to remain trusted. Critical thinking and responsible media use are among the most essential elements in order to strengthen the cognitive dimension of societal resilience to stand up against disinformation and other types of aggressive information. To a different degree, the selected countries are facing multiple challenges connected to the information environment. However, in all these countries, media literacy is seen as a tool for facilitating and saving democratic processes.

Although the term “media literacy” does not have a single definition, and could be interpreted in different ways (for example, to fit in with a donor’s agenda), the definition used for the purposes of this analysis is put forward by the European Commission: “Media literacy refers to all the technical, cognitive, social, civic and creative capacities that allow us to access and have a critical understanding of and interact with media. These capacities allow us to exercise critical thinking, while participating in the economic, social and cultural aspects of society and playing an active role in the democratic process”.¹

By using this umbrella definition, the research team introduced and designed the **A-A-A approach** on mapping media literacy developments, which means focusing on **A - actors; A - audiences** and **A - activities**. Given the dynamics of developing the media literacy sphere, the team focused on a set of country specific recommendations in the following dimensions: cross-sectoral cooperation and networking; evaluation of media literacy activities; sustainability and funding; media involvement. The executive summary starts by providing background information. The general findings are listed afterwards. Selected threats and strengths are followed by general recommendations.

Methodology

Detailed mapping of media literacy actors, audiences and activities was created using the following methodology, which included:

- Desk research;
- Semi-structured in-depth expert interviews;
- Online survey.

The **desk research** included an analysis of policy papers, traditions of development of media literacy, and significant changes in the trajectory of the development of the environment that have occurred. The focus of the analysis was to evaluate changes within the last three years. However, it includes relevant historical background on media literacy policies; media education development and disinformation resilience development; and the redirecting of responsibility from one institutional body to another.

For the **semi-structured interviews**, the scheme of selecting experts was created. This included selecting at least three experts from the following clusters: government related; non-government related; academia and media related; supporters and donors related. 16 experts were interviewed by using the same interviewing guide with five subsections of questions.

Survey - **the online survey** was created to collect qualitative data on activities and audiences used by different

¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/expert-groups-register/screen/expert-groups/consult?do=groupDetail.groupDetail&groupID=2541>

media literacy actors. In the survey active actors were asked to fill in the questionnaire. The survey included four sections, including the profiling of selected media literacy activities. The research team used available conferences and meetings to collect additional information needed to make an analysis, which focused on 1) cross-sectoral cooperation and networking; 2) evaluation of media literacy activities; 3) sustainability and funding; 4) the role of media in increasing media literacy.

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1. General Context

1.1. Policy Regulations

Media and information literacy is a relatively new, but rapidly increasing, basic competence with worldwide importance that is being included in states priority agendas. The Republic of Moldova lacks a national policy, concept and strategy that particularly targets the Media Literacy area and there is no specially designated institution or authority to oversee it as part of its mission. However, if referring to the extended field of preventing and combating disinformation and propaganda and informational security, relevant concepts were defined or framed as part of a series of legislative documents and national strategies in recent years.

The [National security strategy, 2011](#) listed among the national security priorities was ensuring information security and it specifically recognised the increasing role of information technologies in the field of state security. It also recognised the need for actions to ensure the security and efficient administration of national information systems, both legally and functionally, by reducing the main risk factors, such as: cyber-crimes; computer viruses; software vulnerability; negligence or bad-will of users; and unauthorized connection of third parties. In 2018, The Code of audio-visual [media services of the Republic of Moldova](#), also defined information security as the means of protecting information resources, person, society and state. It also included the presence of a set of measures to ensure the protection of person, society and the state to prevent and fight attempts of external disinformation and media propaganda activities directed against the Republic of Moldova. It also defined hate speech as a message that propagates, incites, promotes, or justifies racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, as well as other forms of hatred based on intolerance or discrimination founded on sex, race, nationality, religion, disability or sexual orientation.

In 2017 the [National Concept on information security of the Republic of Moldova](#) referred to prevention, detection and countering of risks and threats to information security of the Republic of Moldova. It also referred to the protection of the national information space and society as a whole from the impact of propaganda and media aggression from outside and inside. The act defines the information security policy of the Republic of Moldova as the set of directions of activity of public administration authorities, their obligations and responsibilities regarding the protection of national interests in the information space. Importantly, it established obligations and responsibilities to respect the balance between the interests of the person, society and state. It also defines such terms as: propaganda, information space, hybrid security threat, information weapons, psychological operation, information war and information security. However, Moldova does not have specific mechanisms to identify hybrid threats – such as fake news, propaganda, and disinformation – or develop protection tools that respond to rapid technological changes.

On 12 January 2018, a controversial 2017 amendment sometimes referred to as the “[Anti-Propaganda Law](#)”

came into force and restricted the broadcasting of Russian news channels. This was a controversial, as media CSOs had different opinions on it. The text of the law did not refer to Russia, but it states that in order to protect the audio-visual sphere and ensure information security, the only factual, analytical, military, or political-themed television programmes which may be broadcast in Moldova are those produced in the European Union, Canada, the USA, and all other states which have ratified the European Convention on Transfrontier Television. The opinion of interviewed experts regarding this amendment and similar potential initiatives were contradictory, some said that in Moldova media environments, this is a needed initiative that is meant to “clean and protect the media content”. However, others said that that in our digital era, this is a less effective approach and the focus should be on increasing citizens media literacy and ability to objectively analyse and identify propaganda and manipulation, rather than restricting it. In December 2020, promulgation of the Law amending the Code of audio-visual media services of the Republic of Moldova cancelled this so called “anti-propaganda” law.

Information Security Strategy of the Republic of Moldova for the years 2019–2024 and the Action Plan for its implementation stipulates that the Republic of Moldova shall ensure a secure information space with effective anti-disinformation means and policies for all national state and non-state entities, while guaranteeing the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in line with principles of democracy and the rule of law, in particular access to information and freedom of expression. It transposed the NIS Directive² into the national legislation and creates an action framework against cyber risks. The document emphasises the increased risks in the context of hybrid threats and information warfare, especially in relation to online media and social networks. The Action Plan lists the following actions to monitor and prevent disinformation: offering courses on disinformation techniques; development of criteria for assessing the information as a disinformation product; and an adjustment of the legal framework to streamline the data collection process to identify the funding sources of those involved in misinformation actions. However, the most recent published *Report on the implementation of the Information Security Strategy* is for the 2019 period only.

In 2020 a *Government Decision on the Creation of the Coordination Council for ensuring the information security was drafted* and currently is pending adoption by the end of 2021. The members designated are multi sectors representatives of all relevant institutions, from the governmental, media, private and civil society sectors. The coordination and monitoring activity of the Council will be done in four dimensions in particular on (a) the cybersecurity level, (b) the operational level in the field of defence, information, counter-information, investigations and sanctioning of violations of the information security, (c) the info media level, represented by public and private traditional and online media and (d) the civic-private level, where civil society organisations, representatives of the public and private ICT sector, international experts will be invited to monitor, provide assessments and policy contributions in strengthening the cyber and information security.

Regarding media sector legal framing and policies, in June 2018, the Parliament adopted in its final reading the *National concept of mass media development in Moldova*³ which served as a reference point for public policy within mass media. These policies aimed at strengthening the role of the mass media system in securing constitutional right to information of citizens and in consolidating a democratic society. The document established normative framework for regulating the activity of mass media, so as to ensure its functioning on democratic principles and in a secured media space. Most of the interviewed experts agreed that the national concept should be updated for the next future period. They also stated that it should stipulate the role of mass media in educating and promoting media literacy, supported by a practical action plan. After

² The acronym for Network and Information Security, but also the short name of the first European Directive on Cyber Security

³ The Concept has been drawn up by national and international experts as well as representatives of civil society elaborated as part of thematic subgroup no.4 „Elaboration of the Concept of media development in the Republic of Moldova with the support of the Joint Project of the European Union and the Council of Europe “Promoting media freedom and pluralism in the Republic of Moldova.

the summer 2021 Parliamentary elections a new *Parliamentary Commission/Committee on Culture, Education, Research, Youth, Sport and the Media* was formed, and the interviewed representative confirmed that raising media literacy is an important priority and objective of the commission. However, there is still less clarity regarding what exact governmental structure oversees the media sector framework and activity.

An important part of media literacy is the digital skills and competences, which is becoming an increasing priority. In 2021 [UNDP Moldova launched the “Accelerating Digital Transformation in Public Sector Project”](#), which is envisioned to serve as the platform of support for the recently appointed Deputy-Prime Minister on Digital Transformation. This is a first time in Moldova as this is a newly created position. Among other objectives, the projects aim to support the Government to accelerate digital literacy, both in the public and private sectors, as well as facilitate the inclusive digital transformation that considers gender, age, vulnerability and divide in digital access and digital literacy.

In August 2021, media CSOs [called on the new Government of the Republic of Moldova](#) to implement real reforms, which would create conditions for the sustainable development of Moldovan journalism according to democratic and European principles. They also reminded the Government of a set of relevant draft laws, prepared with the support of international organisations, where the adoption was blocked by the old government. This would address the massive use of media platforms for the purpose of political promotion and distribution of false information, distortion of the media market by stimulating unfair competition and the abuse of dominant positions.

In 2021 The Association of Independent Press has submitted [the Draft of National Media Development Programme for 2022-2025](#) to the Parliamentary Committee on Culture, Education, Research, Youth, Sports and Media and to the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Moldova. At the same time, they submitted the draft action plan for programme implementation. The drafts were prepared by a working group with the participation of civil society experts and representatives of ministries and other central authorities. The documents mention that Media education can and must become a tool for promoting a pluralistic and inclusive media. It requires political strengthening to integrate mandatory media education into the school curriculum and the adaptation of teacher training programmes for media and digital skills. This area was placed under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Research. The specific objective 3.3 of the proposed draft action plan refers in particular to media education skills development and the proposed action for development and the introduction of an optional media education course in pre-university and university education.

From 2017, [the Ministry of Education approved the primary level Media Education optional course](#) a Media Education optional course for schools was officially approved and now is currently available for all three levels of school education (more details below under the 1.2 Actors chapter).

1.2. Actors

In Moldova a diversity of organisations and institutions contribute and implement media literacy initiatives and are described under the following main categories below.

Government

Ministry of Education and Research was mentioned by most of the persons interviewed as the most involved governmental media literacy actor up till now. Besides, the support in adopting and implementing the Media Education optional course described above in 1.2. Actors - Formal Education Institutions and Academia sec-

tion, a lot of other media literacy related projects that are targeting children and youth, were or are realised in partnership with Ministry.

The experts interviewed, specified that the fact that Moldova has an approved Media Education curricula at all three levels, is an important milestone for media literacy. Even at a regional level, as an expert mentioned “*a small revolution in Moldova*” and a “*success story in the region*” was achieved, that would not be possible without Ministry approval and support. It was mentioned that an important contributory factor was the efficient communication and openness with the Ministry. This was made possible as the former State Secretary and media literacy contact person at the Ministry was a media literacy expert and co-author of the optional Media Education course. As a result of the August 2021, parliamentary elections, Moldova has a new Government, and accordingly all Ministries are under a new leadership that involves a certain transition period.

Several of the interviewed media CSOs that currently implement media and digital literacy related projects, are seriously concerned about the weaker openness, communication, and responsiveness of the new leadership of the Ministry of Education and Research. Some mentioned, that there is still no information yet on who the new media literacy contact person is at the Ministry and that this is an issue of concern for the success of the future planned project activities and priorities in the area of media and digital literacy. The interviewed Ministry representative, however, reconfirmed their commitment to further support the media literacy related initiatives, its openness and need for collaboration with experts and civil society for successful results. As many public institutions facing human resource, expertise and budget deficit, the Ministry of Education and Research rely on both civil society expertise and donor community financial support. They recognised that much of the progress achieved in the educational system would not be possible without this assistance. The same position was expressed by donor representatives and media CSOs “*We should not wait for any initiatives from the Ministry, they don’t have enough capacity to make this change, Independent Journalism Centre should continue the lead on these initiatives*”.

Parliament

Some representatives of the donor communities that support media literacy project and media CSOs, point out that there are multiple questions marks at the moment about the exact role of current Government. There is no clarity on whether media literacy will be a priority or lesser-priority for the new Government and Parliament and who exactly will take the responsibility on this area and on mass-media development. After the summer 2021 Parliamentary elections a new *Parliamentary Commission/Committee on Culture, Education, Research, Youth, Sport and the Media* was formed. As the title suggests, this commission covers a multitude of priority areas which are relevant and related to the media literacy area. During the interview with the representative of the commission assurances were given that access to qualitative and diversified sources of information, combating propaganda and misinformation and increasing media literacy skills are important priorities. They also stated that the Commission is open to public discussions, collaboration and receiving expertise and support from both Moldovan CSOs and legal experts in these contexts.

Education and Academia

In the 2017-2018 academic year the Media Education optional course was officially introduced in the Moldova primary level schools’ curricula. This was an initiative of the Independent Journalism Centre, with multiple donors’ support ([DW Akademie Europe and Central Asia](#), [Internews in Moldova](#), [USAID Moldova](#), [UK in Moldova - British Embassy Chisinau](#), [Embassy Office of the Netherlands in Moldova](#)) and was a result of an official

agreement reached with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research⁴. Starting 1 September 2018, the Media Education optional course was launched at middle school level and in 2019, the third consecutive year, the course is taught at all three levels of school education. Overall, in the period 2017-2021/22, almost 12,000 students from all three levels of education studied the optional subject Media Education in at least one school in all regions of Moldova and each year, there is an increase in the numbers taking the course. Almost all the teachers that teach this course, were trained through the Independent Journalism Centre 's media literacy programmes in the preceding years with the support of donors.

It is worth mentioning that there is a *very high selection among optional courses* since the pupils and students have the possibility to choose only one optional course from a list of more than 80 optional courses for all school levels. An important competitive advantage in this context, is the fact that the Media Education optional course is one of only a few that offers teachers a full package of necessary support and materials: Training of trainers (ToTs), detailed curricula, printed and online format manuals in Romanian, Russian and even in Braille⁵ symbols and audio formats. Additionally there is a lot of other media literacy teaching resources and tools, such as quizzes, [Media Literatus computer game](#), video tutorials, articles and interviews on media literacy topics etc. All this information is constantly updated and uploaded online on the online platform www.educatia.mediacritica.md, which was specially created by the Independent Journalism Centre. Also, for the fourth consecutive year in October, the Independent Journalism Centre in partnership with Ministry of Education promoted and supported the Media Literacy week activities in schools.

Even if, Media Education curricula and manuals were available in Russian and training was offered for pedagogues of schools teaching in Russian, the rate of schools that would be likely to adopt the media literacy course would be much lower. In the 2019-2022 academic years only 30 schools were reached. One of the main reasons mentioned by several interviewed experts and confirmed by the Ministry of Education and Research representative, is that schools teaching in Russian have less or even no available hours for optional disciplines. This is because the compulsory curricula include more disciplines compared to schools teaching in Romanian, but the allowed maximum study hours per week is standard for all schools. The Romanian language and literature lessons are compulsory subjects for schools in Moldova, but in the schools teaching in Russian the Russian Language and Literature are additional compulsory subjects. In the Gagauzian region and Taraclia's schools, Gagauzian and Bulgarian languages are additional compulsory subjects. The Ministry of Education and Research representative confirmed that they are trying to find a solution to revise the distribution of the maximum number of compulsory subject hours. They will try and make the official adjustments needed to allow all schools and classes the opportunity to select at least one optional subject (from a maximum of two allowed).

Most experts agreed that the Media Education optional course was an important achievement, but it is not enough to only teach media education as a separate optional subject. Moldovan schools should develop media literacy in the youth by integration of these elements into the mandatory disciplines, through the use of innovative teaching and learning techniques that promotes critical thinking. As one expert mentioned *“the elements of critical thinking should be more intensively promoted, we need to encourage children to ask questions, to debate, to share their opinions, not to focus only on the smartest children, but involve all”* and *“the current education system does not offer the space to develop critical thinking”*. Teaching media literacy infused in teaching plans in the current curriculum of obligatory disciplines, however, would be a challenge for the current educational system and requires a longer-term effort and support.

Regarding extra-curricular and non-formal media literacy activities for children conducted in schools, media CSOs representatives said there should be a more rigorous approach and selection of who can *“enter into*

⁴ Current Ministry of Education and Research

⁵ Braille symbols is used by visually impaired people all over the world in their native languages and provides a means of literacy.

schools and talk about media literacy". This is because at the moment it depends only on the decision of the school administration. No one checks or can guarantee the quality and content of the information offered since media literacy trainers do not require any official certification. On the other hand, other media CSO representatives consider that collaborating with schools should not be excessively bureaucratic.

An important category of 16-19 years old Moldovan students do not have access to the Media Education optional course, these are the ones who decide to continue their studies in Technical and Vocational Schools and Colleges. These institutions have a different curricula framework, and no assigned hours for any optional disciplines, which is a gap that needs to be addressed. This was mentioned by few media literacy experts as a recommended priority for the Ministry of Education and Research, but also relevant to the educational and media literacy field CSOs.

Most of the experts interviewed recognised that the educational system is facing a qualitative and quantitative deficit of teachers, and that most teachers unfortunately have weak abilities in both digital and media literacy. Also, there is a need to promote and implement more innovative teaching skills that would provide the environment and opportunity to develop children's critical thinking among other soft skills, that are mandatory for preparing the young generations for a life in the digital era.

In this context, several media CSOs have recently launched media literacy capacity building initiatives and projects at Pedagogical University level. As DW Akademie partners, teachers and lecturers of the State Pedagogical University, Ion Creanga receive additional media literacy training. They are taught how to develop new modules and participatory teaching material so that they can pass on media skills to students ranging from elementary schools to universities. In 2021 the "Stopfals_PedCamp" was organised for upper class students of Moldovan pedagogical colleges, as part of a project implemented by The Association of Independent Press (API), funded by U.S. Department of State and United States Embassy.

Media Sector

The media sector profile of a country is an important environmental factor that can be both a positive or a negative influence on the media and information literacy level of its citizens. Both private and public media outlets, were mentioned by most of the interviews experts as important media literacy actors from the following perspectives: (1) a source of objective and qualitative news and information for citizens, (2) a potential source of propaganda and manipulation and (3) content creators and/or distribution platform for media literacy initiatives and campaigns.

Regarding the first two perspective, Moldova has a developing independent media sector, but is also facing both internal and external media propaganda. The Moldovan media landscape lists a large Russian language media, especially the rebroadcast Russian TV. Different polls give conflicting figures about Moldovans' trust in the Russia media, but the popularity of Russian television is acknowledged. Over the preceding years, channels that rebroadcast Russian content have the top positions in audience measurements. In this context, it is worth mentioning that according to all conducted recent national level surveys, television represents the main source of information used by Moldovans. Similar rankings are also observed for the local versions of Russian newspapers, such as Komsomolskaya Pravda v Moldove, which has the highest circulation among the print media in Moldova for years. This newspaper has significant false, manipulatory propaganda content, as confirmed by fact-checking organisations.

However, the 2020 survey on [Population perception of the media and media skills in the Republic of Moldova \(2020\)](#) conducted as part of the Internews in Moldova MEDIA-M project, showed an increase of audience interest in independent media as news sources, and a decrease for oligarch owned or politically affiliated media. These results confirm that independent media (TV, online and newspaper), both at national and re-

gional/local level have improved their capacities and media quality content. The quantity of content offered also improves access to quality media and un-biased news for citizens and made possible by the availability of media sector development donor support.

Besides the Broadcasting Council, Public TV and Radio in Moldova was also mentioned by the interviewed experts as an institution that should be a major media literacy actor, but is not. They do not have original media literacy related content, but being a public institution financed from citizens contribution, it should be the first media to serve the public interest. As an expert declared “*media literacy should be their natural and permanent initiative*”. Moreover, a media CSO representative mentioned that in 2018 they had long negotiations with Public TV to broadcast free of charge a series of media literacy video spots within a communication campaign initiative but were refused. The programmes were, therefore, distributed by public TV as paid commercial advertising. An Parliamentary representative interviewed mentioned that there are some legislative initiatives to define the term and procedures regarding “public interest advertising”. They also confirmed the opinion that Public TV needed serious restructuring, because their level of performance and quality of content is decreasing. Their audience is also decreasing despite the large number of employees (600-800 for the national public company Teleradio-Moldova (TRM)) paid from state budget. Some experts also shared the opinion that public media always served the political leadership and are led by politically affiliated people.

Civil Society

All interviewed experts shared the opinion that most of the media literacy progress achieved are mainly the results of civil society organisations initiatives and efforts, supported by the donor community. Some mentioned that in an absence of state interest and prioritisation of media and media literacy development, the CSOs took the lead on these activities, including some considered to be the responsibility of the state, such as media legal framework development.

When being asked to name the most important CSOs that are major media literacy actors, the following organisations were listed in most of the cases: Independent Journalism Centre Association for Independent Press and Youth Media Centre. However, many national and regional Moldovan CSOs are also implementing grants-based media literacy related activities. These activities can be organised under the following main categories: media literacy education or events for their beneficiaries or targeted audiences; production of media literacy content resources in a variety of formats; and media literacy research. Also, media literacy related research, policy briefs or studies are produced by a range of international CSOs, such as IPRE, WatchDog.md, Freedom House Moldova, IJC, API and other. The NATO Information and Documentation Centre in Moldova also organises events on topics such as cybersecurity and hybrid war. Information details regarding CSOs projects are also presented under *1.4. Mapping Activities chapter*.

Donor Community

The efforts to identify and draw attention to disinformation and fake news, information security, and the importance of critical information and the media literacy level of Moldovan citizens, have been mainly led by civil society organisations (CSOs) with the support of the international donor community. The most frequently mentioned donors that support both media sector development and media literacy in particular, as also confirmed by data analysis, are: DW Academy, USAID, [Internews in Moldova](#)⁶, and IREM/IREX Europe.

⁶ Internews in Moldova is the implementing organisation of the major and long-term project “Media Enabling Democracy, Inclusion and Accountability in Moldova” (MEDIA-M), however, most of the surveyed or interviewed organisations mentioned it as donor since Internews in Moldova also offers grants to the media and CSOs.

DW Akademie's activities in Moldova focus on media and information literacy, and on the qualification of young journalists and instructors. Since 2017, it has been a major donor supporting the Independent Journalism Centre initiative to promote Media Education optional course in schools. It has also supported the development of curricula and textbooks in 2017-2019 along with continued support for training teachers and university lecturers, and development of new modules and participatory teaching material for students ranging from elementary schools to universities.

In 2017, [Internews in Moldova](#) and its implementing partners Freedom House and Independent Journalism Centre launched the biggest media sector support project "*Media Enabling Democracy, Inclusion and Accountability in Moldova*" (MEDIA-M). It started as an USAID funded project and is now currently co-funded by UKAID. Its major goal is to promote the development of an independent, professional media. The specific objective was to build an understanding of the consumer demand for independent, reliable, high-quality news and information. The project helps media literacy initiatives through grants and supports to its implementer partner Independent Journalism Centre. Besides the manuals for the optional courses mentioned above, the project also organises periodic training for schoolteachers (Training of Trainers (ToT), in both Russian and Romanian. Also, Internews in Moldova is offering grants for media literacy educational activities, media literacy content production and other initiatives targeting a variety of audiences, that are funded by a wider variety of donors. In 2021 the MEDIA-M project was extended for an additional two years until 2023.

In 2021, ERIM (Equal Rights and Independent Media)/IREX is finalising the US Department of State Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour funded project, "Strengthening Independent Media and Media Literacy in Moldova/ SIMML". The project was implemented in partnership with the Moldovan Association of Librarians, thus creating a network of media literacy trained librarians in Moldova.

The European Union (EUD Moldova) "Strategic Communication and Support to Mass-Media in the Republic of Moldova" project also has a separate component that targets media literacy. The aims of the project are to increase awareness on media related processes; develop a media literacy training programme; innovative tools for promoting critical thinking about media and information; and conduct training on media literacy for students from Moldovan universities.

In recent years the opportunities for financial support of the media sector in general and media literacy initiatives in particular are increasing and the donor list supporting these is expanding. Besides the donors mentioned above they include: The UK Embassy in Chisinau through the UK's Good Governance Fund, The Embassy of Finland, The Netherlands Embassy in Chisinau, The Embassy of Sweden / Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, The Soros Foundation in Moldova, The European Endowment for Democracy, The Black Sea Trust and others.

Periodic in-person or online media donor meetings are organised every 3 to 6 months with the aim to create better communication, reduce overlapping efforts and improve the sustainability of the supported projects. Most of the interviewed donor representatives mentioned that it is good initiative, but the format of the meeting can be improved. Among the suggestions mentioned for improvements were to have discussions on specific topics and area of media development, including the media literacy challenges and priorities. It is recommended that regular collections of information be made regarding each donors' priorities and allocated resources. This should not only be at the general media sector development topic or implemented project level, but also on specific categories, such as: media sector capacity development, content production, media literacy and fighting disinformation etc. This would make more disaggregated information available regarding the allocated support of donors on specific areas such as, the media literacy and countering disinformation efforts, geographic distribution mapping and information on audiences already covered and those that are neglected. A better coordination on specific priorities and areas would contribute to reducing overlapping donor efforts or even double funding of similar initiatives.

Other Public Institutions and Non-State Actors

Along with schools, public libraries have become the most important public “media literacy ambassadors” in Moldova today. They are also a good example of the impact of multiple donor coordinated investments that included partnership project initiatives. These initiatives have also included follow up by the SIMML project and as a result, a strong institutionalised community level library infrastructure was consolidated at a community level. The media literacy network activities included: developing an online manual; curricula and a media literacy toolbox for librarians; organising media literacy Training of trainers for librarians resulting in media literacy workshops across Moldova; capacity building for the Moldovan Association of Librarians; and grants for creating *Media corners* in libraries.

The [Broadcasting Council](#) was mentioned by a majority of interviewed experts as an important public actor that can and should contribute to an increase in the media literacy level of Moldovan Citizens, through preventing and sanctioning the distribution of false, manipulatory or audio-visual propaganda. The primary stated mission of the BC, is by definition to be “*the representative and the guarantor of the public interest*”, and according to Article 10 (2), “*the protection of programme services to safeguard consumers’ rights is ensured by the BC*”. However, when asked about the performance of BC and its activity, the majority of the experts mentioned that BC have a more reactive, rather than proactive position regarding sanctioning false news, manipulation and propaganda by mass-media. It was also mentioned that BC members had a low level of relevant expertise and their political affiliation results in selective decision making and limited sanctions. This raises concerns about the real level of autonomy or political influence. Among the arguments it was mentioned that only limited or no sanctions⁷ were imposed for media ethical and professional violations reported by media CSOs or media experts. Most of the interviewed experts agreed that with the current (note: September 2021) BC membership, no significant performance improvement is possible. The 2020 Media Forum resolution also mentioned the “*Old and obsolete practices in the work of the Broadcast Council and of the Supervisory Board of the national public media service*”.

The current legislator’s intention to increase the accountability of Broadcasting Council, resulted in new amendments to the Code of Audio-visual Media Services, which are stated in the draft law registered in the Parliament on 14 October 2021. The amendments allow, inter alia, the possibility to remove any member or members of the Broadcasting Council from office should such persons be found to abuse their power or improperly fulfil their duties as a BC member. The majority of NGOs [expressed their concern](#) about the proposed amendments, that literally allow any Parliamentary majority to withdraw members of the supervisory and management bodies of the public broadcaster. *The Parliamentary Committee for culture, education, research, youth, sport and mass-media* representative noted that besides civil society concerns, expertise support and alternative proposals are needed and welcomed and expected to identify an efficient and legislative solution to improve BC performance, transparency in decisions and accountability.

The *Security and Information Service* is the main public authority in charge of the coordinating the implementation of the Information Security Strategy. Their main mission lies primarily in ensuring transparency in the process of forming public opinion by the actors, namely the electronic written press and participants in social networks.

According to national public opinion polls, *the Church* is the most and largely trusted institution among a major section of Moldovan society, having a significant influence on their beliefs and even decision making. Unfortunately, there were various cases of its representatives spreading fake news or manipulatory information, including politically or pandemic related content. An example is the [declaration of The Metropolitan Church](#)

⁷ Receiving and examining complaints from public authorities or from a physical or legal entity directly affected by a breach in audio-visual media is part of BC mission. If breaches to the law occurred, BC can apply the following sanctioning measures: public warning, temporary withdrawal of the right to broadcast advertisements, fines, temporary suspension of the license, and withdrawal of the broadcasting license.

that nanochips would be injected into the human body through COVID-19 vaccine, which would result in the population being controlled, through 5G technology.

1.3. Target Groups

According to the survey responses and key informant interviews, the main audiences and groups targeted for the media literacy initiatives mentioned age and regional categories, fewer referred to professional or sector related targets. The most mentioned targeted groups referred to were: people from the regions, youth, teachers, journalists/content creators, librarians, ethnic/linguistic minorities, elderly but also the general public.

Children and Youth

According to data analysis, interviews, and survey data most of the media literacy activities are targeting the younger generation, half of the organisation respondents to the survey mentioned covering this group category. The argument for this priority age group is the fact that they are the future adults and voters and investing in the future is the best strategic and most efficient approach. Also, some mentioned that it is also the easiest target audience to reach, for example: through schools (both through formal and nonformal media literacy education activities), online social networks, but also extra-curricular in-person educational activities. Also, there is a lot of content production training offered to youth and as one of the interviewed experts mentioned *“creating content is an important tool and methodology to build media literacy skills, particularly for youth”*.

Some of the experts mention that improving the children’s and youth’s critical media and information literacy level, indirectly targets the older audience too. Those children return to their primary and extended families and multiply their gained knowledge and skills by teaching their parents and grandparents. Another controversial opinion was the fact that today’s youth are digital and internet users from a young age, which makes them from one side one of the most digitally skilled age category, but on the other hand also the most vulnerable. For example, the online channels (FB, Tok-tok, YouTube, Instagram etc.), which are popular among youth social networks, are often a major source of fake, false and manipulatory information and a space full of digital security risks and threats, such as cyberbullying, sexting etc.

Adults and Elderly

Around 65% of the survey respondents listed the parents among their targeted media literacy activities audiences, a similar percentage mentioned journalists and almost half listed teachers. The older population was mentioned as being one of the most media literacy vulnerable and at the same time neglected target audience. The elderly, particularly in rural areas, are harder to reach and they have much lower access to online media or social networks, so *“you cannot reach them through FB and YouTube tutorials”*. They are burdened with other, *“more important”* needs and problems, and it is harder to *“get them out of their houses”*.

Most of the experts concluded, that even if youth are a priority target, the elderly should not be neglected, particularly since statistics shows they are among the most vulnerable target of manipulation and false news during elections, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The most efficient and most used ways to reach them according to data desk research and interviews, are in-person, regional and local informational activities and TV information campaigns. However, the information, format and messages need to be adjusted to this age profile. To quote one of the interviewed expert’s opinion: *“A good false data combating campaign can make a change, as long as they speak to the target in a clear and easily digested language, those campaigns can be very useful. Too sophisticated and too technical language is less effective.”*

Regions and Minorities

Being asked to mark all types of target audience associated with their media literacy projects implemented within the last three years, more than 80% of organisations selected the regions category. The Russian speaking regions were mentioned, being the most exposed audience to Russian media propaganda and manipulation, particularly the Gagauzian region. However, some experts highlight that there are Russian speakers in other regions too, and that the population from northern regions, like Balti are even more neglected in this sense. The hardest to reach seems to be Transnistria region population, due to the current political situation and status of this region.

Marginalised Audiences

Among the marginalised groups were listed people that have limited media consumption possibilities, either due to lack of access to internet sources or even TV, detention, mental health or due to certain disabilities, such as visually and hearing-impaired people. As part of its MEDIA-M project, Internews in Moldova, supported the Association of the Visually Impaired of Moldova to translate, adapt and publish media literacy textbooks into Braille and audio format for all three levels of education: primary, middle, and high school. This marked the first time that people with visual impairments have access to media literacy resources in an accessible format. The materials were offered to the three specialised Moldovan schools for visually impaired children, in libraries throughout the country, and in the regional outposts of the Association (including the Transnistrian region).

Other marginalised audiences mentioned were the linguistic minorities, particularly the Roma community, that besides the linguistic aspects, also have a higher rate of children and youth that are not enrolled in schools and are accordingly illiterate.

1.4. Mapping Activities

When asked about how media literacy activities and projects should be defined, the most popular answer during interviews and in the online survey responses, referred to: improving the individual's media literacy skills and critical thinking abilities; and the ability to objectively analyse and distinguish false, manipulatory or propaganda media content or any other information. However, there were opinions that media literacy is also about "*information/content production abilities*", "*fact-checking*", "*having an opinion, supported by facts and reality*", is about "*freedom of speech*" and fighting the "*the inhibition caused by the educational system, family and society, who does not encourage diversity of opinions and constructive dialogues, debates, asking questions etc.*"

Overall, based on the analysed publicly available information regarding media literacy projects and initiatives in Moldova, the in-depth interviews performed and online survey responses, the media literacy projects and initiatives over the recent three years can be classified under several categories of media literacy components as follows:

Educational Activities for Improving Individual Media Literacy Skills (in-person and online)⁸

The non-formal education media literacy activities were among the most frequently reported media literacy activity by surveyed and interviewed CSOs. These were most frequently offered as short, up to few days' train-

⁸ Note: The formal education was described under the Actors chapter of this research - Formal Education Institutions and Academia.

ing, webinars or camps. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation, many interviewed representatives mentioned that they needed to postpone or readjust the planned activities to online training and webinars or switch to different formats. Some experts mentioned, that is recommended to decrease the educational activities that covers the general media literacy subject and focus on more tailored training, with more concrete, and specific topics and skills to be developed for different target groups, according to their profile and needs.

Media Literacy Materials, Resources, Research

As a result of the analysis of information and materials published online on media literacy topics on Moldovan websites and social networks, it can be concluded that there is a large variety of online media literacy resources available and offered in a diverse variety of formats (manuals and guides for formal and non-formal education, video tutorials, quizzes, podcasts, media literacy computer games, even media literacy songs and a puppet-show etc.). They target the general public, but also specific target groups, most often the youth. Most of these are available in Romanian or both Romanian and Russian versions. Also, a series of research studies were published recently assessing disinformation, propaganda, informational security and partially covering media literacy aspects, they also covered more specific topics such as COVID-19 disinformation.

Since these resources are usually placed mainly on the websites, FB or YouTube channels of the organisation producing it, it makes it harder to do a precise up to date assessment of the total amount and types of resources produced, because there is no available common resource platform for all media literacy that would constantly upload or host all media literacy produced resources. The existence of such a platform, would contribute to reducing the risk of overlapping and thus wasting resources on creation of materials that already exists.

Online Security and Digital Literacy

However, as many of the persons interviewed mentioned, media literacy, as well as critical thinking, are too general terms that implies a multitude of specific skills, abilities, and environmental aspects. Every year new media⁹ gain more and more territory, bringing new possibilities and benefits and becoming accessible to a larger population, however, and they also bring more new formats that pose threats and risks. As a result, to address these specific challenges there has been a recent increase in initiatives aiming to improve online safety skills, to prevent or reduce such phenomenon as cyberbullying or online security threats in Moldova. One example is the online security resource platform for youth, parents and teachers www.siguroonline.md. Also in July 2021 the Ministry of Education and Research signed an order piloting the [Standards for the protection and safety of children / students in the online environment](#) in 6 schools across Moldova using previously developed supporting materials: [Internet Literacy Handbook](#) and Romanian and Russian versions [Guides](#) created with Council of Europe's support.

During the pandemic digital literacy became a priority, particularly in the education system that had to adjust to the online learning format. According to the [Social and Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 in the Republic of Moldova](#), developed by UNDP Moldova in November 2020, about 150 000 pupils had no access to education during the lockdown period, because of the lack of necessary equipment, knowledge or connection to internet among pupils or teaching staff. The low digital literacy level of many schoolteachers, particularly from the elderly age category, was also recognised as a serious weakness for the educational

⁹ The [New Media Institute](#) defines new media as "a catchall term used to define all that is related to the internet and the interplay between technology, images and sound", and includes Websites, Blogs, Email, Social media networks, Music and television streaming services, Virtual and augmented reality etc, That's in contrast to "old media," which is defined as all forms of communication that came before digital technology, including radio and TV and printed materials such as books and magazines.

system. Several interviewed experts also shared their parental perspectives, that in their opinion, pupils and students have a higher level of digital skills than their teachers and parents. Several initiatives already support mainstreaming digital tools at all levels of the educational system.

Major projects aimed at developing school students' and teachers' IT and digital skills are [Tekwill in every school](#) and funded by USAID, Sweden, EU4Moldova and UNDP Moldova and [Future Classroom / Clasa Viitorului](#) project funded by USAID, Sweden, UK aid, the Orange Moldova Foundation and the Liechtenstein Development Services Foundation. Moreover, a [National Programme for Digital Literacy among Teaching Staff](#) was launched in July 2020 by the Ministry of Education and Research to ensure the development of teachers' digital skills. The Online educational platforms <https://invat.online/> and www.educatieonline.md created to digitise the educational system were launched, but there are no online media education lessons/videos uploaded yet on either of these platforms.

Media Literacy Campaigns

The communication campaigns have both the advantage and disadvantage of targeting the general audience through TV and online social campaigns in short informative videos, infographics and posters. Even if this one of the most used approach, there is no proven data regarding their impact. To quote one of the experts interviewed "*it takes more than a 3) sec – 1 min video to make a change*". As some of the experts mentioned, the most efficient communication campaigns are those focusing on a concrete topic such as, manipulation and propaganda during election campaigns or COVID-19 pandemic misinformation and that adjust their message to the targeted audience profile.

The level of disinformation and fake news related to the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccinations was mentioned by many of interviewed experts as an indicator of the low level of media and information literacy of the Moldovan population. A survey commissioned by Watchdog.MD confirmed that Covid-related fake news and conspiracy theories were widely trusted in Moldova since 38% of respondents agreed that the virus was created by Bill Gates. The so called "positive" aspect of this negative situation, was that the state and public institutions received a global and national level reminder and evidence of the level of damage that false news and misinformation phenomenon can cause. This resulted in the appearance in 2021 of a new category of media literacy initiative and national level information campaign to fight the COVID-19 pandemic related disinformation.

The Soros Moldova funded COVID-19 anti-manipulation podcast is an example on www.sic.md. Another example is the EU-funded 'COVID-19: Civil Society Resilience and Sustainability' project plan, a grant programme to fund projects that focus on countering disinformation on the health risks related to COVID-19 and the vaccination, and inform the local population, mainly vulnerable groups, about government actions.

Internews in Moldova implemented a different campaign format through a media literacy minibus campaign. This provided on-the-go media literacy information to commuters and other people in transit by placing media literacy infographic posters on minibuses throughout the country.

Multimedia Content on Media Literacy Topics

Both traditional and new media produce content dedicated to or integrating media literacy topics. To bring some examples, TV8 had a [DezinFAKEtare](#) project in 2019 that produced a series of short videos/fillers to debunk the fake news by presenting and analysing specific examples of the false stories. ABRAZIV and Youth Media Centre created a video series on media information and manipulation or pitfalls on the Internet, "[Education for Media](#)", created by and for youth. This was broadcast nationwide via the public broadcaster, TRM, and the Moldovan association for local stations, Canal Regional.

Critical thinking through entertainment was mentioned as a fresh and successful approach in reaching the general public. To cite one of the interviewed experts: “*Humour combined with information analysis and debunking is a successful recipe*”. Recently in Moldova, due to available funding for entertainment content production, humour, comedy, satiric media and online projects become more and more popular. They have a large audience, both online and on TV. The media literacy messages and information integrated or packaged in this attractive, funny, and easy to digest style offered large subscribers and followers to those projects, and it was mentioned as an efficient approach.

Podcasts also became more popular, including in Moldova. The Independent Journalism Centre with the support of the Embassy of Finland in Bucharest, produced media literacy podcasts on disinformation, manipulation and fake news ([Podcast cuMINTE](#)), as part of the one-year duration Innovative media education tools for well-informed citizens project, which was finalised in June 2021 but a new series was launched recently.

One of the most popular Russian news portal Newsmaker, used a new and unconventional approach in tackling the issue of media literacy by creating the [first online series](#) in the Screenlife¹⁰ format, in Russian.

Fact Checking and Combating Fake News Platforms And Materials

These type of platforms and materials were mentioned as a necessary contribution to improving the media literacy level. However, experts mentioned that this information needs to be offered in a way that allows individuals to gain media literacy skills and abilities. To use the well-known proverb, it is important not just to catch the “*fake fish and give it, but to show and explain how the fishing process works*”. The most popular and most sustainable debunking fake news platform is the [StopFals](#) online platform, which was launched in 2015 by a consortium of three media organisations. It aims to counter the effects of propaganda and help citizens critically analyse information. However, similar projects and products of shorter duration appear periodically, particularly during the election campaign period. [T \(V\) E Privește !](#) is a new similar Independent Journalism Centre initiative that allows media consumers to critically analyse the content broadcast on radio and TV, and then to signal those they consider inconsistent with deontology, journalistic ethics and legislation in force. Another example is the Moldova’s [trols.org](#) platform, developed as part the Media Hackathon organised by the Independent Journalism Centre, that detect false Facebook profiles/trolls.

Media Literacy Agenda and Future Priorities

All interviewed experts confirmed that the donor community in partnership with civil society are setting and implementing the agenda regarding Media and Information Literacy, or a national level assessment of the dynamics in media literacy and disinformation, due to the absence of a national state concept or strategy. CSOs, media and education experts have more grassroots knowledge since they work with different audience experience. They understand both the challenges and opportunities and are expected to inform donors on the topic and be able to justify certain media literacy approaches and priorities. There are several communication platforms where the future priorities in this area are discussed, like the quarterly or half-yearly Media Donors Meetings and the annual [Media Forum](#).

¹⁰ **Screenlife** is a new, increasingly popular format for storytelling in the film and digital industries. Everything that the viewer sees happens on the screen of a particular device - a computer, tablet, or smartphone of the hero of the film.

1.5. Funding

According to the questionnaire responses, most of the organisations implementing media literacy activities and projects are completely or predominantly dependent financially on international donors or foreign embassy funds, and much less dependent or not dependent on state, public authorities, individual donations or crowdfunding financial sources. Also, the survey response rates showed that for more than half of the surveyed organisations, almost all media literacy projects were funded by one donor.

As for the general duration of funding for the implemented media literacy activities, the funding is mainly project based on short or medium-term and 80 % stated that they had no projects with a multi-year non-project-based funding designated for media literacy activities. Being asked about reasons that may determine or determined the organisations to refuse or give up on submitting a grant proposal, around half of the respondents mentioned the condition of mandatory own contribution to the project. Among other possible reasons were listed complicated and long project application templates, strict deadlines, required monitoring and evaluation aspects or the repeated refusal for previously submitted project proposals. Two organisations mentioned that the only reason to not submit a grant project proposal would be if the call for application objectives does not match their strategic mission or objectives.

As already mentioned, supporting independent media and media literacy related areas are part of the mission of many major foreign donors, foundations, and embassies and most of the interviewed experts confirmed that donors influence directly and indirectly the duration of activities, cooperation, selection of target audiences etc. and that many of the implemented Media Literacy projects and initiatives are donor driven.

1.6. Moldova in Indexes

The [Media Literacy Index](#) launched in 2017 to measure the potential for resilience to post-truth, fake-news and their consequence in 35 European countries and contribute to finding solutions, does not include Republic of Moldova. The other related international reports assessing some aspects relevant to media literacy are listed below.

	2019	2020	2021
World Press Freedom Index	91/180	91/180	89/180
Global Innovation Index	58/129	59/131	64/132
Global Peace Index	65/163	63/163	59/163

As of 2021, according to the World Press Freedom Index, Moldova lost one position and now ranks 81st out of 180 countries. It ranks 64th out of 132 countries in the Global Innovation Index and 59th out of 163 countries in the Global Peace Index.

2. Country Findings and Recommendations

2.1. Cross-sectoral Cooperation and Networking

The cross-sectoral cooperation was mentioned as among the key success factor for many media literacy projects. The implementation of the Media Education optional course in schools was possible only as part

of a long-term joint effort and partnership between the Independent Journalism Centre and the Ministry of Education and Research, with the involvement of media and education experts and financial support and constant support offered by multiple donors.

Another example of sustainable and institutionalised result is the transformation of the public libraries across Moldova into media literacy “ambassadors” and information centres. This would not have been possible without the partnership between CSOs and the National Association of Librarians, and a strategic and long-term capacity building support from the donor community.

Another example of cross-sector communication is the Hackathon format events, open to teams of journalists, IT developers, programmers, designers, bloggers, media consumers etc. The Independent Journalism Centre organises an annual Fifth Power Media Hackathon, and of its seven categories, three were dedicated to media literacy.

Both traditional and new media, are increasingly involved by CSOs, predominantly as part of paid contracts, as both content creators and content distribution platforms of media literacy information and campaigns. This collaboration results in a consumer friendly and widely accessible format of media literacy related information, media monitoring results or fact-check information, that is offered to existing online audiences and specific target audiences or social networks communities (followers, subscribers etc.).

Regarding networking and cross-sectoral communication opportunities, the most frequently mentioned event was the annual Media Forum, an event that gathers national and international experts and representatives of media, civil society, donor community and state representatives. On the agenda are discussion topics related to media developments and challenges including disinformation and media literacy topics. However, most experts mentioned that there is a deficit of cooperation and communication between civil society and state institutions that have or should have media literacy priority as part of their agenda. There are certain expectations for a positive dynamic, since the new parliament and government elected in 2021 are taking the lead on many areas relevant for media literacy.

A potential new and regular platform for cross sector and international level networking and cooperation was launched, on 17 September, 2021 by the Independent Journalism Centre, the *Moldova Media Literacy Forum* organised in Chisinau. It brought teachers of the Media Education optional course and local and foreign experts to discuss the latest developments in the area, adopt the experience of neighbouring countries and examine the prospects of this new subject in Moldova. The forum participants drafted a resolution, to request the Ministry of Education and Research to initiate a platform for dialogue with civil society, experts, teachers, as well as other actors interested in developing and implementing educational policies to promote media education. The aim was to increase the rational use of media by children, adolescents, young people and parents. According to Independent Journalism Centre, no official response has been offered so far.

At the end of 2021, MEDIACOR - the first digital-media production centre hosted by the Moldovan State University will be launched. This is a partnership with the U.S. Embassy, USAID, The Governments of Sweden and the United Kingdom, Education and Research Ministry, Culture Ministry, State University of Moldova and COR Association. The aim is to equip students, journalists and content creators with the tools they need to ensure Moldovans have access to high quality, independent journalism. This hopefully will offer new opportunities for creating innovative media literacy projects and content.

Strengths

- The media literacy initiatives and projects that were implemented through cross-sectoral cooperation and networking, have competitive advantages compared to single implementer projects due to: a mix of expertise areas of the implementing partners; a better potential to reach particular targeted audiences

among the specific community and beneficiaries of partner organisations; and the possibility to have a larger geographic coverage through projects activities.

- The donor community encourages and supports the partnership project, also some media literacy activities are followed up and funded by a consortium of donors.
- The newly elected parliament and government have former civil society sector experts in their teams, that is a favourable background and opportunity to improve the cross-sector cooperation.

Weaknesses

- Moldova is lacking a national concept or strategy that would set the long-term priorities for increasing the media and information literacy of Moldovan citizens, that would allow identifying the priority areas of actions and cross-sectoral roles and responsibilities distribution among government, parliament, civil society, media sector and donor community.
- In the absence of a media literacy national strategy or policy, there are certain gaps in communication and coordination among different governmental institution, donor or civil society that work in the field of media literacy or countering disinformation, this sometimes leads to overlapping or desynchronization of media literacy efforts.
- There is no designated governmental or state institution that is currently officially responsible for supporting the improvement of media literacy abilities of Moldovan citizens and to develop and coordinate a national strategy or plan.
- There is no unique joint online platform where all media literacy related resources, educational materials and activities opportunities could be uploaded to, archived and accumulated. Usually, all media literacy related information and resources produced are placed on the implementer's website and social platforms pages. This makes it difficult to make a general and exhaustive assessment of the currently available media literacy resources and their formats produced in Moldova. This knowledge would avoid funding the creation of resources that already exists and avoid overlapping.
- No regular meetings or communication platform specially dedicated to and focusing on Media Literacy topics, that would gather all relevant cross-sector actors.
- Some CSOs share their reluctance for collaboration or sharing ideas with other actors, being afraid that this information may be used by "competing organisations" and their project ideas and expertise "stolen" and used to receive donors' financial support
- Collaborations between organisations are most often a result of donor driven recommendation or precondition within a specific project and ends after the project and funding is finalised.

Threats

- If a successful cross-sector collaboration or partnerships is not properly institutionalised and are led by or dependent on a specific person or point of contact, the sustainability of the collaboration can be at significant risk if the person(s) leave the represented institutions or changes their area of activity.
- Due to limited human resources and in some cases expertise, governmental or state institutions are less capable of taking the lead or actively engage in the relevant area of Media Literacy or fighting disinformation related activities and initiatives.

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- While having considerable benefits, involving influencers, public opinion makers, artists or journalists might have a negative impact if a Media Literacy related activity and campaign use the image and voice of a certain public person, that later can produce or distribute false or propagandistic information or be part of an image crisis caused by a negative behaviour or public declarations.

Recommendations/Opportunities

- Create a national media literacy concept or strategy as a separate document or this priority may be integrated into a broader relevant national level document. It should identify the priority areas of intervention and cross-sectoral roles and the distribution of responsibilities among government, parliament, civil society, media sector and the donor community.
- Identify and designate the governmental or state institution to coordinate the national strategy for improvement of media literacy abilities of the Moldovan people.
- An institutionalised networking and cooperation multi-stakeholder platform for coordination and cooperation in Media Literacy is recommended to be created or integrated as part of a bigger media or disinformation area similar initiative. It should have designated key contact persons and representatives from all sectors. Major actors' institutions and organisations should have multiple levels of coordination and have representatives from different authorities as well as civil society - sectional and cross-sectional.
- National and international networking for information and experience sharing, events that facilitates to identify Media Literacy potential partnerships at both intra and cross-sector, national and international levels are recommended to be supported.
- The Broadcasting Council needs to be reorganised to become more proactive to sanction disinformation, manipulation and fake news and increase their openness and (re)actions to the respective media CSOs and experts' reports and declarations.
- Information security and defence related structures (SIS, Parliamentary commission for security) have a potential for a more active involvement and formal cooperation with media disinformation and propaganda experts, media CSOs, IT sector representatives and other relevant for informational security actors, that may cover the institutional expertise gaps in this specific area.
- Partnership media literacy projects should be encouraged, where one implementing partner owns the media literacy expertise, resources, tools etc. and the other comes with their specific area of expertise and access to specific targeted audiences from their community of beneficiaries.
- Moldova has a variety of Media Literacy ambassadors: teachers in formal education (Trained Media Education teachers), media literacy trained librarians and experts from civil society and media organisations. The collaboration and communication between these networks should be encouraged.

2.2. Evaluation of Media Literacy Activities

Results evaluation and impact assessment were mentioned among the most challenging aspects of the media literacy projects, several of the surveyed organisations even responded that donors Monitoring and evaluation requirements were a significant reason to give up on the idea to submit an media literacy project proposal. Half of the surveyed organisations evaluated the capacities for media literacy impact measurement

as weak or relatively weak. Indeed, civil society and the media sector, have a general deficit of experienced monitoring and evaluation staff and having a designated person is still a luxury for most organisations. Monitoring and evaluation responsibilities are usually integrated into other job positions, like project coordinator, or distributed among staff. This leads to a weaker, inconsistent monitoring and evaluation approached in project management. For impact level evaluations, most of the organisations outsource the services by contracting monitoring and evaluation experts or research companies to develop and implement the required monitoring and evaluation data collection and analysis, if the budget is approved and available for such activities. Some of the persons interviewed, noted that media literacy quizzes or pre and post activity tests are used the most as an evaluation tool during training or online webinars.

The lack of a national or international level evaluation methodology that is used on a regular basis that would offer a country level assessment regarding disinformation and media literacy levels dynamics, makes it hard to make an evaluation of the progress and impact level reached. It also makes it hard to find data comparable to other countries. As one of the interviewed experts said, “It is hard to achieve a media literacy change, but even harder to prove it”. There are however several national level surveys that also included media literacy and disinformation data.

The most relevant and most mentioned national level evaluation was the National survey [Population Perception of the Media and Media Skills in the Republic of Moldova](#) conducted for the second time in 2020 by Internews in the Moldova MEDIA-M Project. It showed that the percentage of respondents who can identify manipulative information has increased in two years from 51 to 59%, while their assessment of the ability of the general population to do the same has barely changed from 30 to 31%. Compared to the baseline 2018 survey, the 2020 one included an additional short media literacy sub-section where respondents were asked to read short stories concerning current events and decide whether the story is real or not. This section was meant to go beyond respondents’ self-reported appraisal of their media literacy skills and instead evaluate their actual ability to detect fake news. The respondents were given five short news items and asked to identify each as real or false. Only 8% of respondents were able to correctly distinguish all five examples.

The Ministry of Educations and Research do not have any quality data regarding media literacy skills of the students or children, only some related 2018 PISA related indicators are available. In May 2021, the Independent Journalism Centre contracted an evaluation consultant to perform a results and impact assessment of the Media Education course, based on the control group and survey approach and found that there were some slight and moderate differences in the way of thinking, attitudes, and reactions among students who took the course and those who did not.

An important source for information is also the media monitoring reports, that expose the most often used manipulation and propaganda techniques, ethical journalistic principles violated and provide a mapping and ranking of the white, grey and blacklist medias. Also, the regularity of the media monitoring reports data allows a comparability between years and may serve to diagnose the quantity and variety of manipulatory and propaganda media content. An important role and constant radar of propaganda, manipulation and fake news cases is also the debunking fake news platform StopFals.

Strengths

- All interviewed experts understand the need for and importance of accurate and trusted monitoring and evaluation methodologies in assessing the media literacy progress.
- There is an increase of both quantitative and qualitative research, studies, policy briefs that evaluate media literacy related topics in Moldova such as: disinformation, manipulation, propaganda, fake news, cyberbullying etc.

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- Some donors have monitoring and evaluation requirements and provide support and assistance to organisations for better assessment of the projects activities results.
 - Larger and longer-term media literacy related projects, usually implemented by consolidated CSOs, have monitoring and evaluation budgets that allow results and impact level measurements of the media literacy activities to be performed.

Weaknesses

- Low in-house monitoring and evaluation capacities of organisations, including the ones implementing media literacy projects, that results in data scarcity regarding media literacy projects results and evidence of reported achievements.
- Most of the reported monitoring and evaluation data refer to output level information such as number of activities, materials, trainees, online audience reach and beneficiaries self-perception data regarding the media literacy skills improvement or utility of the attended media literacy events or resources read.
- Limited budget for qualitative and impact level measurements of the media literacy initiatives
- Limited media literacy evaluation expertise in the consultancy and research market.
- Lack of a country level index or research, that on a regular basis would assess the Moldova people media literacy abilities and environmental factors dynamics.

Threats

- The lack of expertise in designing and implementing relevant and correct monitoring and evaluation data collection tools, may lead to incorrect or manipulatory data.
- Since the most used measurements rely on output level and self-perception assessments, mainly through surveys, and cannot be confirmed through additional reliable evidence-based data, there is a risk that media literacy activities, projects and formats report positive results and continue to be promoted, even if in fact they are less efficient.
- Some of the media literacy implementers are still reluctant to share and report to donors and the general public such valuable information as challenges faced, lessons learned and even failures of their media literacy activities. As they are afraid “to damage their reputation”, the result is that no necessary improvements or adjustments are being made to less effective media literacy activities, or donors continue supporting these.

Recommendations/Opportunities

- A national or even regional level media literacy evaluation initiative, through a partnership of several relevant actors and co-funded, is recommended. This approach would allow a mix of the necessary competencies, expertise and resources to measure the media literacy skills of Moldovan citizens. Ideally this should be carried out on a regular annual basis. An alternative is also to advocate for including Moldova among the countries being assessed through global or regional relevant indexes, such as [Media Literacy Index](#).
- Creating a set of questions aiming to measure the media literacy aspects of Moldova population could be added to existing periodic surveys performed at national level.

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- Media literacy actors should allocate monitoring and evaluation budgets in their project proposals and donors encouraged to allocate sufficient funds to cover the costs. The results and impact measurements performed on the media literacy activities, would generate useful information regarding the extent of the achieved results, the most efficient media literacy formats for specific target audiences, challenges faced and lessons learned for future media literacy initiatives etc.
 - The media literacy related assessment methodology and tools to be created by a mixed group of media literacy and evaluation experts.

2.3. Sustainability and Funding

Media literacy initiatives and projects vastly depend on donor organisations funding, to quote one of the experts *“This kind of project will never be financially sustainable”*. According to desk check analysis and online survey responses, a lot of media literacy activities are grant based and short-term (up to one year). Besides Internews in Moldova, which, as mentioned, is mostly perceived as a donor, rather than implementer, only a few Chisinau based organisations have the capacity to receive longer-term strategic support and have a more strategic approach to media literacy activities implementation. The most relevant example is Independent Journalism Centre work on creating, advocating and implementing Media Education course in schools, that was a process started in 2017 and that continues today, being supported by few donors for a long period.

The grant-based short-term projects don't allow a longer-term plan to be built and also cannot achieve results that needs a longer duration period, that is why most of these project's list also short and isolated activities, such as producing media literacy resources, training, camps etc.

To receive financial support for larger projects of a longer duration, the grant beneficiary needs to be able to absorb and efficiently manage both the budget and project activities. In this context most of the CSOs are still small organisations, that face a deficit of human resources and expertise. They therefore, only have weak organisational and management capacities to work on project-based activities, rather than on strategies, which means they are eligible only for smaller grant funding. However, some experts mentioned that there is a need for both short- and long-term projects, but that the risk of short projects are related to low sustainability and level of produced results. There is also the risk of overlapping regarding targeted audiences, period, regions or media literacy resources produced or type of activities. To avoid this, several experts mentioned that as part of project proposal process the organisations: (1) submit information, if and what similar activities have already been done, when for what audience and what format, (2) to encourage follow-up on ideas of their own or other organisation's project and to encourage partnerships with other organisation(s).

Strengths

- Media sector development, media literacy and combatting propaganda and disinformation are on the priority list of many donor organisations, additionally reinforced in the recent COVID-19 infodemic context.
- The main actors understand that there is a need for diversifying income sources for media literacy projects.
- There is a pool of trained and experienced Media Literacy experts and also media literacy resources in a variety of formats ready to be followed up and used by new media literacy initiatives and projects.

Weaknesses

- The media literacy projects are dependent on donor funding from the foreign donor organisations and foreign governmental bodies.
- Most donors offer relatively small amounts for short period media literacy projects, that do not allow strategic and long-term media literacy approaches and achievement of better results, since building media literacy skills requires time and significant resources.
- There is a low rate of media literacy projects that are implemented through partnerships, and co-funded by several donors. This situation is partially explained by a limited cooperation and unhealthy competition or “fear” to share the project ideas
- Even smaller grants opportunities come hand in hand with critical aspects or specific requirements, that may be a challenge for less developed organisations.
- Funding media literacy initiatives through crowdfunding, individual or business sector donations, or using the 2% law mechanism has a low probability, because the problem of disinformation and limited media literacy skills are not perceived as a major or important problem that worth supporting. For the same reason the librarians’ media literacy activities in many communities are not supported by local authorities, because of lack of understanding of the media literacy activities importance, therefore, most of the small finance contribution requests are denied.

Threats

- No governmental support, would mean that media literacy initiatives are less possible and financially unsustainable without donor funding. However, some interviewed experts, raised their concerns that governmental funding for media literacy initiatives might imply potential interferences in media literacy initiatives, content, topics covered, factchecking processes and in some cases may cause potential conflicts of interest.
- The relevant governmental and public institutions have limited budgets, human resource and expertise for a more consolidated involvement and funding in the media literacy field.

Recommendations/Opportunities

- To achieve national level, significant media literacy progress in the long run, a consolidated multisectoral support and funding is needed.
- The relevant state institutions should start to gradually take over the responsibility and even lead relevant media literacy initiatives for their area, not only as official partners of CSOs, but also as initiators, implementers and institutions that allocate budgets for this state level priority.
- The media literacy actors and donor community should avoid overlapping, and/or creating from scratch, media literacy activities formats and resources that already exists and instead follow-up on existing media literacy resources, practices and previously trained media literacy experts.
- Donor organisations should support follow-up projects to allow media literacy actors to continue and consolidate their current media literacy projects and best practices. As part of the project proposal

process it is recommended that the applicant organisations: (1) submit information if and what similar activities were already done, when for what audience and in what format, (2) to encourage follow-up ideas of own or other organisation projects and partnerships with other organisation(s).

- Create a joint or promote an existing Media Literacy online resources platform, as an online landing place for all media literacy related resources, where educational materials and activities opportunities can be uploaded, archived, accumulated, and promoted by all relevant organisations.
- Media Education optional course and transdisciplinary media literacy approach in formal education institutions allow a consequent and institutionalised approach and strategy that needs to be consolidated, improved and expanded.

2.4. The Role of Media in Increasing Media Literacy

The presence of a strong and independent media sector that offers qualitative and objective daily news and information was assessed as a significant environmental role by most interviewed experts. In recent years many international donors included support for consolidating the independent media outlets capacities, journalistic competences, financial sustainability, and media content production grants in the Moldova priority areas. It is a positive trend that many of the media organisational support projects are framed on the organisational capacities assessment and targeted at specific identified gaps and priorities of media outlets beneficiaries. This approach allows reaching tangible results such as: a consistent increase of the independent medias' audience reach and engagement; improvement of editorial standards and quality of the content; marketing and business strategies, better financial diversification leading to an overall strengthening of their financial sustainability.

However, the interviewed donors' representatives, media experts and independent media outlets representatives confirm, that now most of the independent media outlets cannot survive without donor grants as they cannot rely solely on commercial income. Access to a variety of independent, objective and qualitative media content is a compulsory environmental factor for ensuring a media literate nation. This, therefore, needs to be supported, including through a favourable media legal framework, advertising market and professional and organisational capacity development opportunities. Moldovan media sector development however requires legal and structural changes to ensure a "healthy" media environment. After the parliamentary elections, The [Media NGOs made an as part of an official call in August 2021: Claiming Transparency, Access to Public Interest information and Real Reforms to Facilitate](#) were needed. They requested a list of objectives to be included in the agenda of the Committee on Culture, Education, Research, Youth, Sports and Media of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova and in the Action Plan for the implementation of "Moldova of Good Times" Government Programme, that would contribute to improving the media literacy situation.

Independent media representatives also reported serious challenges to recruitment, retention and motivation of professional journalists in Moldova, mainly because of the massive emigration abroad of graduates or young specialists or professional transfer of professional journalists to other areas of activity (as information technology, public relations and communication, international donor organisations, development projects, vlogging etc.) that offer higher salaries and/or better working conditions. This negatively affects the quality of published media content, but also may lead to human factor errors when unverified news is published even by media with a good reputation.

The Moldovan Press Council, funded in 2009, was also mentioned by many experts as an important self-reg-

ulation entity. It contributes to improving media literacy, through its basic function to review complaints related to the editorial activity of the newspapers and magazines published in Moldova that have a national, regional and local coverage.

Besides the important role of offering unbiased media content and information, independent media outlets and journalists, including the new media representatives (influencers, vloggers, bloggers etc.) are contracted both as experts or receive grants for implementing media literacy projects and initiatives. These include: content production on media literacy issues; fact-checking materials; and conducting media literacy training and events. According to interview data, regarding the level of donors intervention in the created media literacy related content, some donors have clear principles to not interfere at all in content production processes and editorial approaches and even no branding/marketing principles. Others, however, request the content to be submitted for review and approval, particularly if the media literacy content produced or activity stipulates the donor sources disclaimers and information.

Strengths

- Moldova has a variety of independent media sources, that produce unbiased news and media content, both in Romanian and Russian.
- Donor support and assistance is available and offered to independent media outlets, including to those broadcasting in Russian or regional ones. The support is available for organisational capacity development, media content production, including for media literacy content and activities projects.
- The projects in fact checking or media literacy related issues implemented by independent media outlets and the new media representatives, have produced media literacy resources, which are offered in a variety of media formats, languages and are promoted on a variety of distribution channels.
- The [fact checking platform StopFals](#) launched in 2015 is active and sustainable, even in periods when little or no funding is available to support its activity.
- Besides the formal university education, the development of journalistic and content production skills and knowledge are set up and promoted especially among the youth through a variety of courses, webinars, training and Summer Camps, but also at a higher, practical and professional level through [The Journalism School \(former Chisinau School of Advanced Journalism\)](#).
- Availability of resources, tutorials and trainings/workshops targeting journalists that covers among other, the media literacy related aspects.

Weaknesses

- Almost all media literacy projects implemented by media outlets are donor driven and funded.
- Financial dependence on the government, politically motivated appointments of the Supervisory Body members, political control and weak management problems obstructs the public TV and Radio from transforming into a genuine public service media.
- The public media Teleradio-Moldova lacks an editorial policy regarding producing media literacy content or integrating it as part of an existing media product and is reluctant to cooperate with independent media or CSOs in promoting media literacy.
- There is no state policy regarding assistance to promote media literacy through the media sector.

Threats

- Independent media outlets that are offering objective content and news to Moldovan people cannot survive financially without grants and international donor support and no governmental support for media literacy content is offered to media outlets.
- High audience rates for the Russian media's broadcasting in Moldova are a source of external propaganda and manipulation, both through news programmes, but also in the popular entertainment media content.
- Internal propaganda and manipulation, frequently used by oligarch or/and political affiliated media outlets, coupled with external propaganda affect a major section of the audience in Moldova.
- Websites, social networks pages and groups that disseminate fake, manipulative, or conspiracy material are popular among certain audience categories. There are debunked and reported mainly by civil society actors, such as the Press Council or StopFals, that have no legal sanctioning power as state institutions.
- There are legislative gaps regarding online media and information sources regulations.
- Journalists that produce fact-checking or investigative media content, that contribute to educating a media literate society, still face threats, attacks and challenges in accessing public interest information.
- Broadcasting Council passive activity in preventing and sanctioning the distribution of false, manipulative, violent and unethical audio-visual content, or propaganda, encourages the perpetuation of this type of media content.
- Contracting or involving well-known public figures from new and traditional media (freelancers, vloggers etc.) as leading voices or experts within media literacy related campaigns and activities, along with valid benefits, comes with potential risks if the persons are not properly trained in media literacy or if that public figure later becomes an employee of a politically affiliated media, a political party member or do not respect ethical principles of journalism.

Recommendations/Opportunities

- Donors should continue their support, aiming to strengthen the capacity of the independent media, national and regional, broadcasting in Romanian and ethnic minorities languages, through granting long-term institutional support (as opposed to project-based).
- Encourage and support the media via inter- and cross-sector partnerships-based media literacy content production.
- Review the legislative framework to ensure more transparency regarding both media ownership and their financial sources, that are required to increase trust in the media sector.
- Public broadcaster Teleradio-Moldova should be restructured to be able to produce qualitative and competitive content, that serves the public interest, including media literacy content or integrating media literacy elements as part of existing products. It should be open to partnerships and collaborations with other media literacy initiatives and projects implemented by civil society or other actors.

Concluding remarks - general recommendations

- There is a significant and diverse amount of media literacy resources, format of activities and media literacy initiatives being produced in Moldova in the preceding years, that consolidated a pool of national experts in the media literacy related field of expertise. A major part of these results was made possible mainly due to civil society organisations initiatives and efforts, supported by donor community.
- Mainly international donors and CSOs are setting the media literacy agenda since no state funding is available for these kinds of initiatives. The relevant state institutions should start gradually to take over the responsibility and lead in media literacy directions relevant to their areas of competencies. Besides taking the role as official partners of civil society driven initiatives, they should become initiators, proactive implementers and allocate budgets for this state level priority.
- The government should initiate the development of a national policy or strategy on media literacy, that would establish the priority areas of actions and cross-sectoral roles and responsibilities distribution among government, parliament, civil society, media sector and donor community. They should also set up a functional coordination and implementation mechanism and ensure financial support.
- The relevant state institutions should evaluate the national legislation and practices on fighting media disinformation, fake news, external propaganda etc. and adopt the required legislative amendments. They should build efficient mechanisms for operational and appropriate responses of public institutions.
- National level surveys and research on media literacy are required to be conducted based on rigorous and national representative methodology to evaluate the media literacy dynamics, existing threats and gaps that needs to be addressed on regular basis. The current shortage of such data is a significant challenge for developing evidence based strategies and policies, but also for measuring the overall impact of all invested efforts and funding, and a barrier in identifying the best approaches in addressing different media literacy gaps.
- Media literacy initiatives and projects should allocate budgets for results and impact monitoring and evaluation and donors encourage and assign sufficient funds to cover these costs. They are crucial to generate evidence-based information regarding the extent of results achieved, and the data for the most efficient media literacy formats for a specific target audience etc.
- Donors should continue their support, aiming to strengthen the capacity of the independent media, national and regional, broadcasting in Romanian and ethnic minorities languages, through granting long-term institutional support (as opposed to project-based) to ensure people access to a diversity of objective information.
- The Ministry of Education and Research, in coordination and partnership with media literacy relevant actors from civil society, media, and the information technology sector, should continue to support the promotion of the Media Education optional course in schools. It needs to be updated accordingly but also needs to identify and support transdisciplinary opportunities and approaches for media, information and digital literacy education of both teachers and students.
- Both donor institutions and government should encourage and support long-term and cross-sector partnership projects that would offer opportunities for national level media literacy interventions, and target increasing the media literacy through approaches tailored according to the audiences' profile and needs.

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