



Background Paper on Countering Disinformation through Media Literacy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Media and digital technologies are now integral to everyday life. People’s social, political, and personal experiences are increasingly shaped by online platforms, algorithmic systems, and data-driven technologies. At the same time, the media environment has expanded rapidly, with an ever-growing volume of content, sources, and digital practices, much of it circulating through systems that are complex and difficult for users to understand.
- 1.2 There is growing public and policy concern about how information is prioritised and verified, how attention is captured, and how power is exercised within digital environments. They also place increasing pressure on individuals to interpret, assess, and respond to media and technology systems that are constantly evolving and often opaque.
- 1.3 While regulation and enforcement are essential, they cannot address every interaction or anticipate every new practice or technology. This has significant implications for participation, trust, and democratic life. Supporting people and communities to understand and engage with media and technology in informed and meaningful ways is therefore a critical complement to regulatory approaches, particularly in the context of rapid technological change and heightened societal concern.

2. Media Literacy

Defining media literacy

- 2.1 There is no single agreed definition of media literacy. However, there is broad agreement that media literacy functions as an umbrella term, encompassing:
 - digital literacy (how people use and experience digital technologies),
 - information literacy (how people find, assess, and use information),

- AI literacy (understanding how to use and interact with AI responsibly and effectively, understanding the implications of AI use and navigating the ethical considerations AI presents).
 - media literacy in the narrower sense (how media content is produced, distributed, and interpreted).
- 2.2 Together, these literacies support people in making sense of complex media and technology environments.
- 2.3 Crucially, media literacy is not limited to technical competence. It involves critical understanding and judgement, including awareness of how information and content are selected, prioritised, and shaped within technological systems, and how commercial, political, and social interests can influence what people see and engage with.

Media literacy and contemporary challenges

- 2.4 Media literacy is increasingly relevant in the context of rapid technological change and an expanding media environment. People encounter an unprecedented volume of content, platforms, and digital practices, often within systems that are complex, opaque, and shaped by commercial and political interests. Media literacy supports people to make sense of these environments by developing critical understanding of how media and technology systems operate and how information and meaning are produced and circulated.
- 2.5 In this context, media literacy is fundamentally about empowerment. It enables people to express themselves, participate in cultural and democratic life, and engage meaningfully with media and technology across the life course. Rather than serving only as a response to specific risks or harms, media literacy supports fuller participation in society under contemporary media and technological conditions.

Media literacy as a policy response

- 2.6 Media literacy cuts across a wide range of policy areas, including media and communications, education, digital regulation, culture, and social inclusion, and innovation. It is increasingly recognised in policy and legislation as a public good that supports participation, democratic engagement and innovation.
- 2.7 In the media and platform regulation context, the importance of media literacy is explicitly recognised in the Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022¹ and in the

¹ <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2022/act/41/enacted/en/print.html>

revised Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD)². Both frameworks position media literacy as a means of supporting public understanding of media systems, content, and regulation, alongside statutory oversight and enforcement.

- 2.8 Media literacy is also invoked in policy as part of responses to specific contemporary challenges. In Ireland, it features in the National Counter Disinformation Strategy³, the ‘Adult Literacy for Life’ strategy⁴, ‘The Library is the Place’ Strategy 2023 – 2027⁵ and the Digital Ireland Framework⁶.
- 2.9 At EU level media literacy is integrated into numerous EU policies⁷. It forms part of the Code of Practice on Disinformation⁸, which includes commitments by platform companies to support media literacy and public awareness initiatives. Under the DSA, this Code of Practice was converted into a Code of Conduct in July 2025.
- 2.10 In these contexts, media literacy is framed as a complementary measure that supports informed engagement, rather than as a standalone solution to systemic problems.
- 2.11 At the same time, media literacy is not a substitute for regulation or platform responsibility. Policy approaches increasingly recognise that media literacy must operate alongside effective regulation, institutional accountability, and structural measures that address how media and technology systems are designed and governed.
- 2.12 This is particularly true in relation to disinformation because the negative impacts of disinformation are felt at social, political, and democratic levels, as well as on an individual or personal basis.

3. Media Literacy Across the Life Course

- 3.1 Participation in media and digital environments is shaped by people’s circumstances, opportunities, and needs across the life-course. Media literacy is not static. The knowledge and skills people require change over time, from early

² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2018/1808/oj>

³ [National Counter Disinformation Strategy Working Group](#)

⁴ https://www.adultliteracyforlife.ie/f/120607/x/133e8d1481/15607_all_strategy_web.pdf

⁵ [National Public Library Strategy 2023-2027 - 847de39a-85fa-4b55-a3e9-c71fefc27e86.pdf \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

⁶ [harnessing-digital-the-digital-ireland-framework.pdf](#)

⁷ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2025/772886/EPRS_BRI\(2025\)772886_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2025/772886/EPRS_BRI(2025)772886_EN.pdf)

⁸ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/2022-strengthened-code-practice-disinformation>

childhood through adulthood and into older age, as technologies evolve and as people's social, economic, and personal contexts shift.

- 3.2 As a result, there may be significant differences in the media literacy needs of individuals and groups. Factors such as age, educational background, income, disability, language, and access to infrastructure all influence how people engage with media and technology. Socioeconomic disadvantage can limit not only access to devices and connectivity, but also opportunities to develop the confidence and critical understanding required for meaningful participation.
- 3.3 There is particular concern about widening gaps in foundational literacy and numeracy, which directly affect people's ability to engage with information, media, and digital services. Media literacy initiatives must take account of these wider inequalities and cannot assume a uniform baseline of skills or capacity.
- 3.4 At the same time, it is important to recognise the limits of media literacy. Media literacy cannot compensate for poor universal design, inaccessible language, or systems that exclude or disadvantage certain users by design. Nor can it address discrimination, bias, or harmful practices embedded in the design, governance, or moderation of online spaces. These issues require regulatory, technical, and institutional responses.
- 3.5 Within these constraints, media literacy plays a distinct and valuable role. It supports people to navigate complex environments, understand their rights and options, and participate more confidently in media and digital life.
- 3.6 For this reason, media literacy must be understood as a lifelong learning process, delivered through a range of settings and supports, rather than as a one-off intervention or a solution to structural problems.

4. Promoting Media Literacy: Roles, Functions and Stakeholders

- 4.1 Promoting media literacy is inherently a cross-sector and multi-actor endeavour. Because media literacy spans education, media, technology, culture, and civic participation, no single organisation or sector can deliver it alone. Effective media literacy systems require a combination of strategic vision, coordination, research, delivery, and sustained collaboration across public, private, academic, and civil society actors.
- 4.2 **Strategic direction:** At a system level, there is a need for strategic direction and policy coherence. This includes setting priorities, aligning media literacy with regulation and public policy, and ensuring consistency across sectors. In Ireland, this strategic role is provided by Coimisiún na Meán, which has statutory responsibilities in relation to media literacy and plays a central role in supporting, funding and facilitating national efforts in this area.
- 4.3 **Coordination:** Effective media literacy promotion also requires coordination and collaboration structures that can bring diverse stakeholders together, avoid duplication, and support joint initiatives. In Ireland, this function is provided by Media Literacy Ireland (MLI), which acts as a cross-sectoral platform for cooperation, information sharing, and collective action.
- 4.4 **Research:** Research is another critical component. Understanding media literacy skills, practices, needs, and effective learning methods requires ongoing empirical research and evaluation. In Ireland, this work is carried out by a wide range of researchers across higher education institutions, including universities such as Dublin City University and University College Dublin, often in collaboration with international partners. This research base is essential for informing policy, designing interventions, and identifying what works for different groups.
- In Ireland, media literacy research and insight is also carried out by EDMO Ireland.
- 4.5 **Centres of Expertise and Excellence:** By its nature, media literacy incorporates a wide range of topics and there are a number of centres of expertise and excellence in specific media literacy related topics. For example, the ADAPT Centre for AI, EDMO Ireland for Disinformation and Webwise for Online Safety.
- 4.6 **Training and campaigns:** Media literacy is delivered in practice by practitioners across multiple sectors, who work directly with their target groups. These include teachers and schools within formal education, further and adult education providers such as SOLAS, local authorities and public libraries supported by the LGMA, civil

society organisations, and actors within the media sector itself. These practitioners play a crucial role in translating media literacy concepts into accessible, relevant learning experiences for diverse audiences.

- 4.6 Ultimately, media literacy activities take many forms and cover many topics. They include public awareness and promotional campaigns, training and capacity-building for media literacy practitioners, targeted training for different groups within the public, and research and evaluation to improve effectiveness over time.
- 4.7 For example, DCU's Institute for Future Media, Democracy, and Society (FuJo) has collaborated with partners in Spain and Portugal to secure funding from the European Media and Information Fund, a multi-donor initiative launched with an initial €25 million contribution from Google to support projects countering disinformation. One outcome of this collaboration has been the design of a pilot media literacy training programme for public librarians, which has been rolled out in Ireland with the support of the LGMA and Media Literacy Ireland.
- 4.8 Media Literacy Ireland has collaborated with SOLAS to support its public information campaign on media literacy and its integration of media literacy into existing structures for promoting adult education.
- 4.9 The ADAPT Centre delivers a range of AI related programmes such as its *AI in My Life* programme for Transition Year students, and the DiscussAI programme for seniors. And EDMO Ireland has worked with Media Literacy Ireland to deliver media literacy training for public librarians.
- 4.10 Webwise have collaborated with DCU to develop new lessons for schools for Safer Internet Day - AI Aware: Safe Smart and in Control. Webwise, in partnership with ADAPT and the National Parents Council have also developed a Parents' Guide to GenAI.
- 4.11 This illustrates how empowering people with the media literacy skills and knowledge to function in a digitally dominant environment depends on a connected ecosystem of policy leadership, coordination, research, and practice.
- 4.12 Delivering this range of activities requires sustained funding, institutional support, and collaboration at national and international levels.
- 4.13 Within this ecosystem, Media Literacy Ireland is uniquely positioned to support collaboration across sectors, connect research and practice, and enable scalable, sustainable approaches to media literacy promotion.

5. Media Literacy Ireland

- 5.1 [Media Literacy Ireland](#) (MLI) was established in 2017 by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland in response to the growing importance of media literacy across society. Since its establishment, MLI has developed into a national, cross-sector network bringing together organisations and individuals from media, education, research, libraries, civil society, and digital platforms. MLI continues to be facilitated and funded by Coimisiún na Meán and operates independently of Government.
- 5.2 MLI functions as national infrastructure for media literacy in Ireland, with a focus on enabling, amplifying, and sustaining activity across sectors and communities. Rather than delivering media literacy directly to the public at scale, MLI acts as an enabler, supporting other stakeholders to deliver media literacy messages to specific target groups via trusted third-party intermediaries by providing shared frameworks, resources, training for trainers, and coordination.
- 5.3 MLI's scope and reach are most clearly demonstrated through the following activities:
- **National public awareness campaign:** MLI created the highly visible, nationwide Be Media Smart campaign which encourages people to STOP, THINK and CHECK' that the information they get is accurate and reliable and signposts people to www.bemediasmart.ie for help on how to verify information. This campaign has been cited as best practice and adopted by partners in other countries. Its core messages are widely recognised and have been reused and adapted by organisations across Ireland for their own audiences.
 - **Evergreen resources and shared messaging:** MLI, in collaboration with other partners, develops high-quality, reusable media literacy materials that are freely available to partners. These “evergreen” resources allow organisations to deploy consistent, evidence-based messages in ways that are tailored to their own communities and target groups. In addition, MLI manages a repository of additional resources developed by other stakeholders and provides a free ‘one-stop-shop’ [signposting service to those resources](#).
 - **Organic uptake and local adaptation:** MLI's approach encourages partners to adapt core messages for local contexts. For example, the youth radio station Beat 102-103 developed a very successful regional roadshow for secondary school students in the south east based on *Be Media Smart* messaging, demonstrating how national resources can be translated into locally targeted and relevant initiatives.
 - **Rapid deployment around key moments:** In collaboration with Coimisiún na Meán and EDMO Ireland, MLI has supported campaigns such as [Be Election](#)

[Smart](#), providing ready-to-use materials that could be quickly deployed by organisations and community groups across the country during election periods.

- **Advisory, quality assurance, and capacity-building role:** MLI increasingly acts as an advisor and resource hub, supporting partners with guidance, quality review, and access to evidence-based materials. This allows trusted organisations to communicate directly with their own audiences while maintaining consistency and quality. The annual MLI Awards recognizes and awards best practice media literacy interventions [across a number of categories](#).
- **Train-the-trainer approaches:** MLI supports scalable delivery through train-the-trainer models, equipping practitioners such as librarians, educators, and community leaders to deliver media literacy learning within their own settings.

- 5.4 Through this model, MLI maximises reach without duplicating effort, enabling media literacy to be delivered at scale while remaining responsive to local needs. This approach strengthens Ireland’s overall media literacy capacity and ensures that initiatives are embedded within existing community, education, and media structures.
- 5.5 Over time, MLI has demonstrated the value of this collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach to media literacy. Its work has been recognised in national strategies and frameworks and cited as best practice at European level.
- 5.6 As media and technology environments continue to evolve, the demands placed on MLI have increased. While MLI has delivered significant impact as an informal alliance, its current status as a network with no legal status limits its capacity to coordinate activity at scale, apply for funding, and support long-term planning.
- 5.7 This position was recognised in the 2024 Joint Oireachtas Committee report which recommended that MLI “be reconstituted on a formalised basis, with a remit to provide leadership in driving multistakeholder collaboration and in delivery of media literacy activities and empowered to receive and disburse funding”⁹.
- 5.8 In recognition of this, work is underway with Coimisiún na Meán to ensure that MLI can operate sustainably, build on its existing success, and continue to support a coherent, national approach to media literacy in Ireland.

⁹ Page 12 [The State's response to online disinformation and media/digital literacy, including social media and fake news](#)

6. EDMO Ireland

- 6.1 In 2020, the European Union created the [European Digital Media Observatory \(EDMO\)](#) to
- promote scientific knowledge on online disinformation,
 - advance the development of fact-checking services,
 - support media literacy programmes, and
 - support public authorities in assessing the implementation of the EU Code of Practice on Disinformation.
- 6.2 EDMO is based at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy. EDMO's work is implemented by an [Executive Board](#), which coordinates the activities of the EDMO Network.
- 6.3 The [EDMO Network](#) includes 14 hubs operating across 28 countries in the EU and EEA. Each EDMO hub is part-financed by the European. EDMO Ireland is part of the EDMO Network.
- 6.4 The [EDMO Ireland consortium](#) has three members:
- **DCU FuJo:** DCU FuJo is a research centre that investigates responses to the digital transformation of media, democracy, and society.
 - **TheJournal FactCheck:** TheJournal's FactCheck unit was established in 2016 and, since 2017, is the only verified Irish signatory of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) [Code of Principles](#).
 - **NewsWhip:** NewsWhip is an award-winning platform for real-time media monitoring and analysis.
- 6.5 In addition to research and factchecking, EDMO Ireland supports media literacy responses to disinformation by:
- facilitating training for the Media Literacy Ireland training panel;
 - acting as an advisor to media literacy initiatives; providing training and talks to community and education organisations, contributing to EDMO-wide campaigns and media literacy standards
- 6.6 EDMO Ireland also acts as a crucial conduit for international collaborative initiatives such as the [Be Election Smart](#), the [Be Online Smart](#) campaign and [EDMO Guidelines for Effective Media Literacy Initiatives](#).