

Guidelines

for the Development of
Media Information Literacy
Policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina



Bosna i Hercegovina
Regulatorna agencija za komunikacije



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This document identifies principles and defines guidelines to prepare a media information literacy (MIL) programme and its implementation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

INTRODUCTION

It is based on shared international MIL understanding, analysis of existing studies' outcomes and projects currently running in BiH, as well as personal interactions with relevant actors.

The existing MIL initiatives taken in Bosnia and Herzegovina are very welcomed. These include activities within research, building networks and making resources available online to the wider public. International organisations such as the Council of Europe and UNESCO have often guided and supported work in this domain. Endeavours to follow EU policies, such as the Audiovisual Media Service Directive, which recalls the need to promote and measure media literacy, have also been noted. However, no legislation has yet been adopted.

It is common to other countries to observe that although relevant public institutions rhetorically acknowledge MIL principles, their concrete application lags behind. While international support is solid, particularly from the European Union, the Council of Europe and UNESCO, its adoption in *inter alia*, policy and formal education remains a challenge that can only be resolved within each country.

It would constitute a good foundation to adopt a MIL strategy programme, starting by assessing the current situation. From what is noted, the point of departure for BiH is not so dissimilar from what some other countries, especially in South-East Europe, have (or have not yet) done over the last few years.

It is noted that Bosnia and Herzegovina comes in the bottom tier in some international rankings related to measuring media literacy, such as the Media Literacy 2021 Index compiled by the Open Society Institute and the Digital Economy Society Index (DESI). The former signals a low potential to deal with the effects of disinformation. However, these estimates are based solely on measures of press freedoms and education levels. When talking about media freedom, while MIL competencies are essential in our societies, these rankings should be taken with caution. While they indicate a warning, still they certainly do not measure a country's media literacy level. As for the DESI index, the collection of data in the western Balkans shows the situation of BiH is essentially in line with that in the neighbouring countries.

Therefore, what is currently needed in Bosnia and Herzegovina seems to be primarily a more systematic approach, with priorities and work to be reorganised within clear strategic objectives based on what takes precedence, what is achievable and what needs to be done first. To this end, the scope of this document is to offer a vision of the way ahead.



Considering different existing definitions and models for MIL, it is safe to conclude that the European Commission's comprehensive definition is appropriate to refer to:



“Media literacy may be defined as the ability to access, analyse and evaluate the power of images, sounds and messages which we are now confronted with daily and are an essential part of our contemporary culture, as well as to communicate competently in media available on a personal basis. Media literacy relates to all media, including television and film, radio and recorded music, print media, the Internet and other new digital communication technologies.

Media literacy aims to increase awareness of the many forms of media messages encountered in our everyday lives. It should help citizens recognise how the media filter their perceptions and beliefs, shape popular culture and influence personal choices. It should empower them with critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills to make them judicious consumers and producers of information. Media education is part of the basic entitlement of every citizen, in every country in the world, to freedom of expression and the right to information, and it is instrumental in building and sustaining democracy.”¹

The research community has proposed many other definitions to describe media information literacy. While a shared definition would indeed facilitate policy adoption, it is unlikely to emerge and it would prove non-viable. Still, worldwide the experts very much agree on what MIL is about and what are its constituent parts. In the end, all different models recall the same principles and individual competencies, as follows:

- i. **The skills** to access and be able to use technology and media products and services properly;
- ii. **The capacity** of being able to evaluate and understand the information encountered and the context within which the media is produced and delivered, so-called critical thinking;
- iii. **The ability** to participate with confidence and be well-informed in every aspect of public life, from social networking and other internet communities to elections and democratic processes.

The above competencies must be reinforced and based on people’s capacity to cultivate personal attitudes and approaches. As the impact of the pandemic crisis has revealed,

¹ Communication from the European Commission. (2007). A European approach to media literacy in the digital environment <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52007DC0833&from=el> complemented by further considerations.

people's media routines with work, education, exercise, and socialising have moved more and more online.

In order to be able to adapt and live better in the face of such amplified exposure to the media, those attitudes should include an increased awareness of how we conduct ourselves online. This entails the ability to develop healthier reflexes, observe how our emotions are triggered and understand how this influences our choices to capture attention and drive revenue or propaganda for commercial and political interests when using digital devices.

In addition to the individual competencies referred to above, a set of contextual factors facilitate or hinder the possibility of developing MIL in a country. In particular within **(a)** formal education (media education) and **(b)** media policy.

Please note that this document only addresses the role of formal education marginally. Needless to say, in the long term, for any effective MIL strategy to have a significant impact, the integration of media education in schools, as a separate or integrated subject, is crucial for the development of capable individual citizens.²

As for media policy, while coherent policies are lacking, sporadic initiatives alone cannot have a significant impact. Here, the challenge resides in the fact that policymakers play a twofold role: they represent a primary target of the strategy, and at the same time they are also supposed to be the driving force to implement the MIL programme in the next years.

This document does not expose the reasons for justifying the strategic importance of raising awareness and implementing MIL initiatives in order to bring policymakers as allies of implementing MIL. This has been sufficiently dealt with in numerous exchanges and incorporated in both research and policy papers at the international level. A vast bibliography of studies and policy papers is easily accessible online. Those papers conclude that the development of MIL, therefore developing people's media competencies, skills and attitudes, should be considered vital for establishing a knowledgeable and democratic society, thus contributing to enriching progress and advances in society. Research, authors, civil society, and high-level international conferences have since long underpinned and requested more and better policies.

² The study "Pregledna studija o politikama i strategijama MIP u BiH 2020" recommended the need to harmonise formal education in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the MIL objectives and developing MIL training in the context of lifelong learning.



Based on the above considerations, the following serve as indications to establish media information literacy in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

GUIDELINES

1 Adopt a Media Information Literacy Strategy Programme

In light of what has already been done, it seems that the ground is set to advance to the next level. Therefore, the first recommendation would be to establish a clear MIL programme – to which this document aims to contribute by informing and supporting its process.

An updated assessment of the current situation should be followed by prioritising objectives pragmatically and defining the actions to be carried out.

Following and consequent to the strategy programme, at the beginning of each year, a specific action plan defining annual priorities should be drafted. It is advisable to focus on what is feasible and realistic to achieve and give priority to what can be improved beyond good intentions, rather than offering rhetorical proposals with few possibilities of concrete application.

For instance, while everyday operations should always ensure the basic running of the online platforms, the networks and the meetings at events, if resources are limited in a given year, rather than dispersing energies in numerous streams of initiatives, it could be decided to organise just one leading conference or distribute an information campaign addressing a specific target group. It could be the MIL flagship initiative and the main objective for that year.

2 Appoint a Public Body to be responsible for promoting and coordinating the MIL Programme

It is necessary to set up or identify a public body responsible for coordinating and monitoring the work envisaged by the MIL programme and appoint knowledgeable staff to manage the respective activities to be carried out.

The responsible body will be involved in planning, initiating or coordinating, leading or supporting the envisaged MIL activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It will provide a focal point of contact and send a clear message about the intention of advancing MIL in BiH. The body could also provide expert advice and deliver opinions with complete independence.

The Communication Regulatory Agency seems well-placed to assume that role. It has already engaged in several MIL activities, which appear to be in line with the understanding at the international level of such discipline. They embrace research, networking and projects aimed at both adults and children. Due to their well-established status in the national and international arena, the Communication Regulatory Agency may seek cooperation from different national or international actors to accelerate the MIL process.



To inform the drafting of the BiH MIL strategy programme requires the following key concepts are taken into account:

KEY CONCEPTS

1. Defining MIL's exact objectives beyond general principles can be problematic. MIL encompasses different elements, and deciding which issues and needs it should address requires knowledge and systemic policy support.

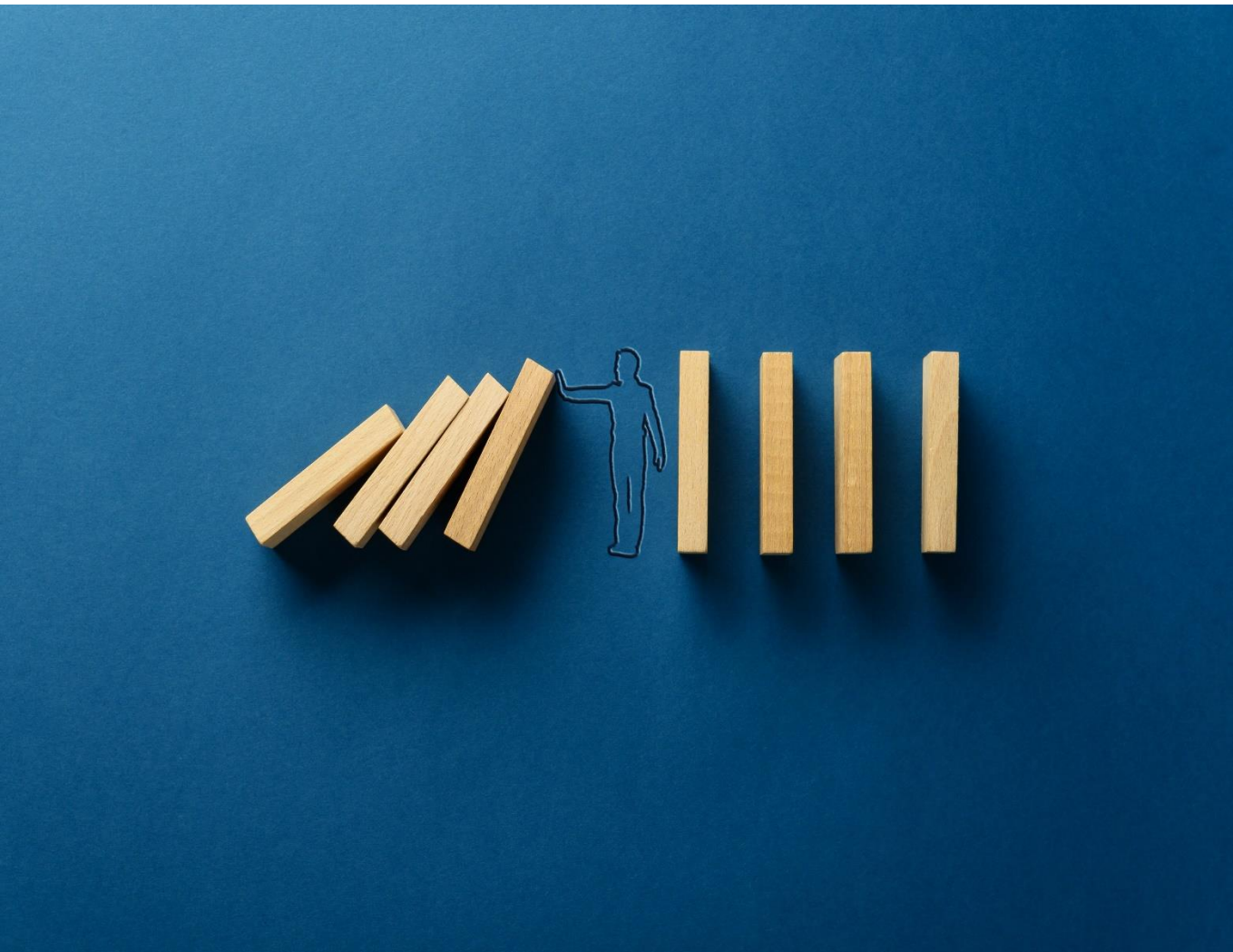
In fact, it applies transversally to many different subjects. Recently MIL has been recalled frequently when confronting disinformation and staying healthy in the challenging time of the pandemic. Additional topics include: the impact on digital inclusion; the role of artificial intelligence and algorithms; protecting personal data privacy and respecting copyright; prohibiting illegal content such as pornography; tackling harmful content, hate speech, cyberbullying and so on; understanding the role of media in democracy and encouraging citizens' participation in communities and public life; evaluating the contexts within which news are delivered, media pluralism and press freedom; understanding political propaganda and commercial advertising; reducing online addiction to video games, social media or online shopping; understanding technologies such as virtual reality and next generation internet; and many more.

It is important to recall that MIL applies to all of the above.

2. MIL is a concept in a constant state of flux, depending on contextual factors such as the advance of technology and cultural, economic, social and educational backgrounds. In this respect, it is noted that the complexity of Bosnia and Herzegovina's cultural, religious, and linguistic environment is clear evidence that any future policy should be adjusted at the local level. To ensure effective results, the institutions and experts who deeply understand their society should be involved in adapting internationally shared principles to those specific realities.
3. In any case, MIL initiatives have to be adopted, having first in mind the benefits of the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina as the ultimate beneficiaries. It could be any person, children, young people, or adults, acting in different contexts and various capacities – either as consumers with rights and obligations or as parents, teachers, media professionals or any other ordinary citizen exercising its public interest.
4. Media literacy applies to all media, online or offline, digital or analogic, including television, radio, the internet, mobile telephones and the press. MIL should certainly

not be limited to acquiring digital technical skills only at the expense of more critical questions of how people evaluate media messages.

5. It is to be noted that scholars often emphasise the risks above the opportunities, protection over empowerment. Still, the two approaches must be balanced, and they go together. Managing both is essential to being media literate, mitigating the risks and benefitting from the opportunities.
6. Relevant actors and stakeholders to be involved in the MIL initiatives include any relevant public institution, academia, civil society, international organisations, media industry, other private and public organisations, groups and individuals.
7. Any effort envisaged should be based on internationally shared principles and values which place human rights and public interests first.



The strategic programme and its annual action plans can be organised in various ways. The following are a few suggestions to be used to organise and manage work and promote MIL in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They are allocated to five areas of intervention: Networks & Events; Practice & Projects; Media Content & Online activities; Research & Training and Policy. Those areas are overlapping, and they inform each other.

FOCUS AREAS OF INTERVENTION

NETWORKS & EVENTS

Collaboration is imperative. It is essential to nurture the debate regularly. Regular exchanges are likely to provide new ideas, refine strategies and prepare for technological advances. Any opportunity should be taken.

The existing MIL network in Bosnia and Herzegovina seems to allow for engagement with different actors. It represents an opportunity to meet, illustrate current projects, discuss results and form new partnerships. Its formalisation is recommended, and the collaborative scope and participants should probably be expanded to act as a hub for MIL initiatives in BiH.³ Its composition should be balanced and include participants from education, civil society and MIL organisations, the media industry and public institutions. Its internal and external communication should also be reviewed to be aligned with the overall strategy.

Participation in international events will ensure being updated with cutting-edge research results, available resources, best practices and general discourse on media literacy in all areas of intervention.

Organising and holding a national annual event on MIL in Bosnia and Herzegovina is advisable to support and foster the existing national initiatives and network, broaden contacts, and refresh knowledge.

³ Bojana Kostić and Kristina Rozgonyi. (2022). [Study](#) on "Implementation of international and European MIL standards in various domestic institutions". See: Multi-stakeholder MIL network, p.13.

Several projects are already currently running in Bosnia and Herzegovina, often in consortia of partners, some funded by international bodies.

It would bring added value if the coordinating body consistently showcased those projects on its MIL online platforms. Services can be offered to distribute content or facilitate partnerships. Once enough data are collected, it could lead to identifying or rewarding good practices. The availability of ready-to-use resources for teachers, practitioners or individuals would prove successful.

To raise awareness about media use, it is logical to use the media itself and produce quality audiovisual content to be distributed to each specific target group. It is therefore recommended to partner with media organisations (for example, TV broadcasters or selected social media influencers) to ensure quality products and a significant impact.

Content should be informative yet entertaining and be informed by experts about their key messages and pedagogy.

As for the specific topic to be considered for content material and information campaigns, it would be up to the coordinating body to decide annual priorities. Translating and redistributing existing campaigns, such as those produced by UNESCO⁴ or other international organisations, could facilitate the starting and execution of initiatives. This could lead to domestically produced content that is expected to be more engaging for local citizens.

The existing website can work well as a repository to share content and as a point of contact for interested parties. A presence on social media (Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook) regularly updated with posts, can highlight the importance of MIL to the general public.

⁴ <https://en.unesco.org/milclicks>

Cooperating with research at an international level will grant expertise and allow for the adoption of proven quality methodologies. To carry out specific national based-research depends on priorities and the budget available. Still, it would be excellent, for instance, to collect reliable data about media use through statistically relevant samples. Small-scale qualitative research with focus groups, surveys or interviews can also indicate trends and be significant.

More ambitious research, such as measuring media levels, could lead to insignificant results when measuring critical thinking skills. Having said that, measuring the tangible impact of each project instead and using indicators following established methodologies, would indicate what works better and what does not make much difference.

Publications and reports, including more operative ones such as the work plan itself, would inform future activities in other areas.

As for training, integrating media literacy coaching into other existing training actions and training of trainers (ToT) initiatives would also initiate a virtuous process. Here links and collaborations with educational departments will be crucial to study gaps and synergies within the curriculum.

Finally, it is recommended to involve young people and children directly in the discussions and research about their media use and in forming policies that will impact them.

POLICY

Media and technology have increasingly significant implications on everyone's daily life, development and well-being and are also vital for governments' proper functioning and communication with their own citizens. There is no real democracy without citizens' participation, and there could not be citizens' participation without critical awareness. In this sense, being capable of using the media effectively helps in the exercise of people's fundamental rights.

New challenges are arising, such as the spread of disinformation using new sophisticated technologies and the industrial scale of micro-targeting advertising.

Artificial intelligence will render this trend even more clear in the coming years.

For instance, it will be difficult, sometimes impossible, even for a media-literate individual to distinguish between what is real and what is fake and to understand the intentions of those spreading disinformation.

Responsibility for MIL, therefore, cannot rest only on citizens' shoulders. To build a safer online environment and empower users, adopting appropriate rules and safeguards to be

followed by broadcasters and online media platforms will contribute to ensuring fairness and transparency in distributing news content.

This is particularly true to ensure the protection of minors, but it also applies to other users and many areas of intervention. In this respect, a rule of thumb for Bosnia and Herzegovina would be to consider and follow as much as possible EU regulations. Beyond the EU *acquis*, it would include current plans, proposed self-regulation, and adopting codes of conduct.⁵

To name a few relevant legislative dossiers, the EU Media Freedom Act, the revised Audiovisual Media Services Directive, the Digital Services Act, the Digital Media Act, and the European Democracy Action Plan.

Setting priorities depends on ambitions and concrete possibilities for any new policy. Encompassing principles in the new law on electronic communications and electronic media would undoubtedly be desirable.

⁵ Bojana Kostić and Kristina Rozgonyi wrote in the [Study](#) on p. 8. "The ongoing and the upcoming legislative and policy-making processes around the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020 – 2024, the preparation of the new Digital Services Act, the European Democracy Action Plan and the Media and audiovisual Action Plan should be closely observed by BiH stakeholders and their outcomes considered for local implementation eventually."

This document identifies principles and defines guidelines to prepare a media information literacy (MIL) programme and its implementation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It offers a vision of the way ahead, through informing the drafting of the BiH MIL Policy strategic programme and its annual action plans.

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